NEW
NICK CARTER
WEEKLY

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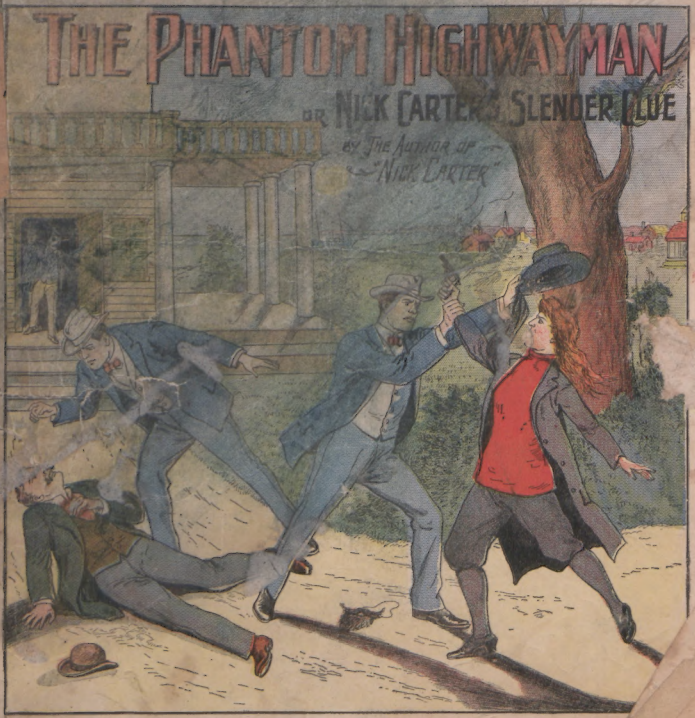
THE PHANTOM HIGHWAYMAN

OR NICK CARTER'S SLENDER CLUE

By The Author of "Nick Carter"



Then, holding her easily with one hand, Nick tore the mask from her face and the hat from her revealing the features of Agnes Marlow, who had dared to make the leap from the Brooklyn

Announcement. Readers of this weekly will find that the stories have been increased more than one-third over their former length. This increase is made in response to a general demand that the weekly be issued more frequently than once a week. To do that is impossible, but we have increased the length to show our appreciation of the favor with which these stories have been received. You will find that there is no drop in the quality with the increase. From this on, these stories will be the longest as well as the best of their kind published.

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THE PHANTOM HIGHWAYMAN

OR,

Nick Carter's Slender Clue.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

THE PHANTOM HIGHWAYMAN.

"Are you familiar with the roads in Westchester ounty, Mr. Carter?"

"Oh, yes; quite so."

"Do you know the roads around Pelham, over near the ound?"

"Fairly well."

"Well, there is a short one there, called Tucker's Lane, hich connects two of the main highways. That is here I was held up and robbed in the neatest manner ssible."

"It happened last night, you say?"

"Yes; just after dark. It was not really quite dark, et."

"And you insist upon calling the person who held you up and robbed you, the 'Phantom Highwayman,' do you?"

"Well, if it isn't a Phantom Highwayman, what is it?"

"Tell me your experience, Mr. Langham; perhaps we can get at the circumstance a little more quickly in that way."

"I can tell you that in a very few words."

"Very good; do so."

"My home is on Tucker's Lane, which is a macadamized road exactly a quarter of a mile in length, and extending, as I have said, from highway to highway. Tucker's Lane has been laid out to extend several miles, in either direction from that point, but so far this piece to which I refer is the only part that has been opened."

"I understand."

"My house is exactly in the middle distance between

the two highways, and I own the land on either side of it to each highway, and also that on the opposite side of the lane, so it follows that mine is the only house there. We are in the city and the country both, as you see."

"Yes; go on."

"There is an electric arc light at either end of the lane, and another directly in front of my house, so the street is never very dark."

"Yes."

"Business detained me at my office yesterday afternoon, so that I telephoned my wife not to expect me to dinner. I dined downtown. I arrived at the corner of the main highway and Tucker's Lane at a little before eight; I do not know the exact time, but that is approximately correct."

"That is near enough."

"You know that, at this season of the year, night can hardly be said to have fallen at that time. It is getting dark, to be sure, but it is not yet entirely dark."

"No."

"Well, when I turned into the lane it might have been a quarter before eight, or ten minutes of the hour."

"And you had about an eighth of a mile to walk to your house?"

"Yes; along a lighted street."

"I understand. Go on."

"I have no fences along my land on either side of the lane; but there is a hedge—osage orange, it is—about breast high. This hedge extends from avenue to avenue along either side of the lane, and is only broken where the gateways pass through it, one in front of my house and the other for the driveway to the stable."

"I suppose the hedge is thick and luxuriant?" asked Nick.

"A hog couldn't get through it, and it is as straight as the course of a rifle ball."

"Very good."

"I had walked about half the distance between the avenue and my house; that is to say, something like half a furlong, when, without an instant's warning, the highwayman—the man, the thing, the ghost, or whatever you please to call it—appeared in front of me."

He paused as if he awaited some response on the part of the detective, but, as Nick made no reply, he continued:

"Whatever it was, it dropped out of the sky, or out of a tree, or came up through the ground at my feet, or materialized out of nothing; you can search me as to how it got there, but there it was, without any error, Carter."

"What did it look like—a man?"

"Why, yes; a man, of course. Ghosts always appear in the form of a man or a woman, don't they?"

"You do not really intend to be serious when you talk about ghosts, do you, Mr. Langham?"

"Oh! no, I suppose not."

"Then let us be serious. When you refer to the highwayman, describe it for what it is—a man or a woman."

"But I don't know which it is."

"Then call it a man."

"All right."

"Now, when did you first see him?"

"When he stood in front of me."

"Where did he come from?"

"I haven't the least idea."

"Was it light enough in the lane so that you could see some distance ahead of you?"

"Yes, indeed."

"And you saw nothing until the highwayman stood in front of you?"

"Not a thing."

"You neither saw nor heard any sign of a person approaching you?"

"Neither the one nor the other."

"Until the apparition stood in front of you?"

"No; not until that instant."

"Then it follows that he was waiting for you, and that he must have dropped out of a tree over your head, or have managed in some way to leap the hedge, doesn't it?"

"You answer; I give it up."

"I should say that to be about the only explanation."

"All right; it satisfies me."

"What happened then?"

"I found myself looking into the muzzle of a revolver, which appeared, at that moment, to be as big as a cannon, so don't ask me the size of it."

"I'm not going to do so. The size makes very little difference. Continue, and tell me all that happened."

"The highwayman appeared in front of me as if he had dropped out of the sky. He had a revolver in his hand, which was pointed at me—at my head, to be correct."

"Well?"

"Then a voice—the voice of a man—which came from directly behind me——"

"Behind you!"

"Yes."

"Then there were two highwaymen?"

"Or two ghosts, eh? Or the chap was a ventriloquist; or—but wait."

"Go on."

"The voice was behind me."

"Yes."

"It ordered me to hold up my hands."

"And you obeyed, eh?"

"You bet your sweet life I did. I didn't wait, either. I just shoved them up as high as they would go."

"Hadn't the chap in front of you spoken?"

"Narry a speak; he hadn't opened his head—and he didn't during the entire ceremony."

"Go on with the story."

"Mind you, I didn't hear a sound behind me during the whole time, except the voice."

"Yes."

"When I put up my hands, I immediately felt other hands in my pockets."

"The person behind you was searching you?"

"Yes."

"Well?"

"It was done systematically, too. I wore a diamond scarf pin, worth about three hundred; he took that. My watch and chain, with the charm attached, was worth about a thousand; he took that. I had eleven one-hundred-dollar bills in a flat pocketbook in my inside waistcoat pocket; he found that and took it. I had sixty dollars in my trousers pockets; he relieved me of that."

"And all the while——"

"And all the while I stood there like one of Mrs. Jarley's wax figures, doing nothing."

"You were keeping your hands in the air."

"You bet your life I was."

"And what was the man in front of you—the one with the revolver—doing all this time?"

"The same as I was—nothing."

"He merely stood there with the gun, eh?"

"Yes, 'merely.' The word doesn't seem quite strong enough for the occasion, however."

"He didn't speak at all?"

"Not once."

"What happened then?"

"The voice behind me ordered me to remain in that position I held for ten minutes without moving, and after that to go directly to my house, and he promised me that I would get a bullet or a knife between my ribs if I did not obey. Then the fellow in front stepped behind me. I waited what I supposed was ten minutes, and then—well, then I sprinted for home."

"And you saw nothing more of them?"

"No, and I did not hear a sound of any kind, except the voice behind me, during the entire proceeding."

CHAPTER II.

MYSTERIOUS ROBBERIES ALONG THE SOUND.

"When you entered this room, Mr. Langham, you began by remarking that you had been held up by the Phantom Highwayman, and you made the remark in such a manner as to lead me to suppose that others in your neighborhood have met with the same experience. Is that so?"

"Very much so."

"So the Phantom Highwayman is not a new thing in your locality?"

"He's getting to be almost a daily; or, rather, a nightly, episode."

"There have been other experiences like yours, eh?"

"A dozen or more in the last two weeks."

"Have all of them happened in your neighborhood?"

"Oh, no; not exactly. They are all around there."

"What do you mean by 'all around there'?"

"Anywhere in that part of the Bronx, and out beyond that, as far as Harrisons and Rye."

"Tell me how many of these occurrences you know about, personally."

"Three or four."

"Well, which?"

"Three, then, that I know about; but I've heard of a lot of others."

"Since when? When did you first hear about the Phantom Highwayman?"

"About a month ago."

"Where, and what about it?"

"Curiously enough, that also happened not far from my house."

"In Tucker's Lane?"

"No; but on a short street just like it, half a mile further east. There is one curious fact about all these robberies, Carter."

"What is that?"

"Every one of them has happened somewhere near the Sound; I mean within a mile or so of it."

"Why do you regard that as curious?"

"Oh, for no especial reason, save that it suggests to me that the robbers may come from the Sound, don't you know. They may live in a yacht, or something of the kind."

"That isn't at all a bad idea; we will look into it later on. Tell me about that hold up in the street next to you, if you know about it."

"It was my brother who was robbed then."

"What is his name?"

"Bob—that is, Robert, of course. That street is called after him—Langham Place. He was held up exactly as I was."

"Is there a hedge there, too?"

"Yes; just like mine."

"And trees along the walk?"

"Sure. There are trees everywhere up there."

"Did the highwayman alight in front of him as mysteriously as in your case?"

"Precisely the same."

"And he was robbed in the same manner? That is, with a man standing in front of him, holding a revolver pointed at his head, and another behind him who did the talking, and who did the searching of his pockets?"

"Yes. It was all the same method."

"Did he lose much?"

"A little more than I did."

"In cash?"

"Yes."

"Are you in the habit of carrying so much cash about your person?"

"No; not twice a year."

"And your brother—is he in that habit?"

"No; once or twice a year, perhaps."

"How did you happen to have so much money about you when you were robbed?"

"For no especial reason. It just happened so. One of my clients had paid me late that afternoon, and had made the payment in cash. It was too late to deposit it, so I put it in my pocket."

"And in your brother's case—how was that?"

"Something about the same, I think."

"And he was robbed about a month ago?"

"Yes."

"Humph!" said Nick. "It may have been only an accident which led to your being robbed at the very time when you were carrying an extra amount of cash; and that may be also true in the case of your brother, but the incident would suggest that the robbers were somehow aware of the fact that you were well heeled; eh?"

"I hadn't thought of it in that way, but it would appear so—yes."

"Now, you have told me about one robbery besides your own, and you have said you know about three. What about the others?"

"Dick Morton was held up and robbed in the same way."

"Who is he?"

"One of the members of the Samovar Club."

"A friend of yours?"

"Yes, certainly."

"Where was he robbed?"

"About two miles from where I live."

"Was the same method used?"

"Precisely."

"And the neighborhood—was it much the same as yours?"

"Yes—and no. It is more thickly settled. He was robbed later at night, too."

"By two men?"

"By a man in front of him and a voice behind him—that is to say, a voice and a pair of hands behind him."

"Did he also have an extra supply of money with him when he was robbed?"

"Yes, I think he did."

"You are not positive?"

"He lost about two thousand in cash, and I know he is not in the habit of carrying so much around with him."

"In his case, as in the others, the man dropped down in front of him, seemingly from nowhere in particular, and remained silent while his confederate did the talking and the lifting; eh?"

"Yes."

"Well, that makes two cases. What is the third one you know about?"

"Burge Raplee was up against it, too."

"Who is he?"

"Another member of our club."

"The Samovar, you mean?"

"Yes."

"Where is that club located, and what sort of a club is it?"

"We used to call it the 'Hookah,' but that degenerated into the 'Hooker,' meaning a drink, you know, so we changed it to the 'Samovar'——"

"Which also means a drink."

"Sure; but it's coffee this time. It's just a social club, with a little yachting, a little golf, some whist or a game of—well, that's the sort of club it is. We have six acres of shore on the Sound just above Pelham Park. The clubhouse is there."

"Well, what about Raplee?"

"He was held up almost at the club gates."

"Did he lose much?"

"About five thousand dollars' worth of loose stones—diamonds, you know. He always carried a handful of them around with him, you know."

"Did he? Does he still continue the habit?"

"Can't say. Haven't asked him."

"That happened at the club gates, you say. Do you mean where you enter the grounds to go to the clubhouse?"

"Yes."

"And was the robbery performed in the same manner?"

"Just about."

"How did it differ from the others?"

"I don't know that it did differ at all, only that the surroundings were not exactly the same."

"How do they differ?"

"Well, in this case, there was no hedge, but there is a high fence."

"Do you mean a solid fence?"

"Yes; a wall, in fact."

"How high is it?"

"Eight feet."

"And the highwayman dropped in front of Raplee, as he did in your case?"

"Just the same."

"The remainder of the operation was the same?"

"Exactly the same, voice, hands and all."

"Was he entering or leaving the club when he was robbed?"

"Leaving; it was about midnight."

"Those are the three cases you know about. Now, how many others have you heard about?"

"Bless you, I don't know. We've stopped counting them."

"You used the expression, 'A dozen or more;' have there been that many?"

"Yes, or more."

"All the way up the Sound shore, eh?"

"Yes."

"And all carried on in the same manner; the silent man in front, the voice and the hands behind; the sudden appearance out of the silence, and without warning. Are they all the same?"

"Yes, they are; and you can't wonder that the robber has been named the Phantom Highwayman, can you; eh?"

CHAPTER III.

A LITTLE PLOT WITHIN A PLOT.

"Now," said the detective, "you have not yet described the appearance of your highwayman; but, first, one other question."

"Yes."

"If you have known about these robberies for a month, how does it happen that you were not armed when you were attacked?"

"I was armed."

"With what?"

"With a thirty-eight-caliber revolver."

"But you had no chance to use it, eh?"

"No; and it was in the side pocket of my coat, at that. My hand was on it, too; but, bless you, I had no more chance to use it than I have at this minute."

"Where is it now?"

"I suppose the highwayman has it. He took it along with the other calamities he filched on that auspicious occasion."

"What about the others who were robbed? Did they also carry pistols?"

"Sure thing. That highwayman must be getting quite a collection."

"But if the gun was in your pocket, and your hand was upon it, there seems to be no reason why you could not have fired through your pocket."

"I'm mighty glad I didn't."

"Why?"

"Well, for one thing, I might not have hit him, and, for another, even if I had, the chap behind me would have laid me out in return. No; it was better as it was."

"And, besides, there was no time; eh?"

"Yes; that, and another thing. The whole affair happened so suddenly that I really forgot that I had a gun at all."

"And the others who were robbed had something of the same experience, I suppose?"

"My brother Bob did; I don't know about the others."

"Now, tell me how the highwayman appeared. Describe him as best you can."

"He wasn't as tall as I am, and I'm not a tall man by a long shot. He was not so heavy, either. In fact, I should call him short and slight, and as light in his movements as a feather. He was dressed in black, and, I should say, in tight-fitting garments, like what you would call a jersey. There was no white to be seen about him anywhere, not even a shirt bosom. He wore a slouch hat, pulled down over his eyes, and a half mask with drapery around it to conceal the chin."

"And the hands? You must have noticed the hand which he extended toward you, holding the revolver."

"I did. It was covered by a black gauntlet glove."

"You say he alighted directly in front of you?"

"Yes."

"And that you heard no sound at all?"

"No; not even the noise you would suppose he would make by dropping upon the walk. I suppose he wore something on his feet to deaden the sound. The one thing, I am positive about is that he was there, and that I had no idea of his presence until he stood before me, and I saw the muzzle of his gun within four feet of my head—and that's enough."

"What sort of a voice did the other possess?"

"It was a man's voice; rather pleasant than otherwise. Not an unusual voice in any particular."

"Would you recognize it if you heard it again?"

"I'm not sure. I was paying more attention to that gun than to the voice, at that particular moment."

"Naturally. Did you tell your friends at the club about it?"

"I haven't had a chance. I haven't been there since."

"Shall you tell them about it?"

"I think not. I think I'll keep it to myself."

"A good idea."

"You see, the point is, Carter, that I should have been here to-day to see you, even if I had not met the highwayman."

"How is that?"

"I have been appointed a committee of one to engage your services, on behalf of the club. We talked the thing over one night not long ago, and decided that it was up to us to put a stop to the thing; see?"

"Yes."

"And we want you to lay the ghost."

"You mean, catch the highwayman."

"It amounts to the same thing."

"Is there any suspicion among the members of the club that the highwayman may possibly be among their associates?"

"No; not exactly; only it has struck them as mighty strange that the robber seems to know so much about them, when they carry money about with them, and all that."

"Yes; I think so, too."

"And then there is another thing."

"What is it?"

"The club has collected a record of ten robberies performed by this Phantom Highwayman, and every one of the ten is a member of the club."

"And you make the eleventh."

"Yes; besides, there are other robberies that we have heard about, you know. Oh, there is a dozen or fifteen all told. There is one explanation which may account for so many members of the club having been held up, however."

"What is that?"

"Well, the membership is composed of what the world calls rich men. Every man of means in that neighborhood belongs to the Samovar."

"So that the highwayman could not very well run up against a man who had money in his pocket to steal, in that neighborhood, without encountering a member of the club."

"That's the size of it."

"But, all the same, the club has resolved to take action, as a club, eh?"

"Yes; and, Carter, money is no object. I was told to inform you that you could have your head in the matter. No matter what it costs, the club wants that highwayman caught. You can engage all the assistance you want; you can spend all the money you want to; there will be no kick when your bill is sent in. Is that all right?"

"Certainly; but the bill won't be exorbitant."

"When will you begin operations, Carter?"

"There is no time like the present, is there?"

"That's the talk. Can I be of assistance?"

"Yes."

"In what way?"

"By stopping here on your way home this afternoon and taking me up there with you. I would like to see the place where you were robbed, and also some of the other places where the highwayman has appeared."

"Nothing is easier. I will be here at——"

"Make it two, if you can. I would like to be on the ground rather early."

"All right. I'll be here at two."

"And keep this evening open, if you can. I would like you to take me to the club."

"Sure."

"In the meantime, how many members of the club are aware that I am to work on the matter, eh?"

"The whole club knows about it."

"Of course; and, consequently, the whole neighborhood."

"Oh, I suppose so. I did not think to tell the fellows to keep still about it."

"I'll tell you what you might do in addition."

"What?"

"You might hire a wagon with a transparency, you know. You could paint on it: 'Nick Carter has been engaged by the Samovar Club to run down the Phantom Highwayman.'"

"We've acted like a lot of asses, haven't we?"

"Something like that. However, perhaps there is no harm done. I suspect that the highwayman is laughing in his sleeve by this time. He doubtless feels so secure that the mere announcement that I am on his track will not disturb him. You will be here at two, will you?"

"Yes; at two, sharp."

"Good. I will be ready for you."

As soon as Ralph Langham had taken his leave, Nick Carter called Chick into his study, and then, in as few words as possible, he repeated all that had taken place—all, in fact, that was known at that time about the Phantom Highwayman.

"Now, Chick," he said, in conclusion, "Mr. Highwayman knows, as well as the members of the club, that I am to go into the neighborhood to run him down."

"Sure thing."

"Then it is up to us to fool him."

"How are you going to do it?"

"I'm going to start for Tucker's Lane in about half an hour, and I want you to wait here for Langham, make him believe you are Nick Carter, go with him to his house, and afterward to the club. Fix yourself up as an out-and-out clubman, and make yourself as conspicuous as is consistent with good taste. Be Nick Carter, and make every member of the club believe that you are Nick Carter. That will enable the highwayman to keep a sharp eye on your movements while I am doing the real work outside."

"I see; but you will want to see me, won't you?"

"Sure; and I'll find a way to let you know about it when I do. Now, have you got the idea of the game well in hand?"

"Yes, sirree!"

"Then I'll get into a disguise and skip along. Langham will be here at two, remember. Be ready for him, and look for me later on. That is a slick highwayman, Chick, and there is some reason why he never speaks. Either he's afraid his voice will be recognized, or——"

"Or what?"

"Or the highwayman is a woman."

CHAPTER IV.

SOME EXPERT DETECTIVE WORK.

When Nick Carter left his house to go to Westchester County that afternoon, he carried, contrary to his custom, a large satchel, and his reason for that was that he could not conveniently dispose of, on his person, all the paraphernalia which he intended to use before the case was disposed of.

He was much better acquainted with the locality in which the robberies had occurred than had appeared in

his conversation with Ralph Langham, and so he had no difficulty, when he arrived in the neighborhood, in finding the place he was looking for.

That place proved to be one of the many deserted mansions which the city of New York has purchased in the acquirement of that tract of land which is to be known as Pelham Park.

There are many such. For the most part, the city donates the use of them to various charities, but there are others of which no use is made at all, and which now stand deserted, summer and winter.

It was one of these which the detective had selected for his permanent headquarters so long as he should remain in that neighborhood, and as the approach to it was through rather a thick wood, he had no difficulty in gaining the spot unseen.

Once there, he readily discovered a way to enter, for, although the house was securely locked, he had no difficulty in gaining access, and had soon selected a room which could easily be made to accommodate him comfortably.

The location was exactly suited to him.

He was almost directly on the shore of the sound; in fact, from the window of the room he had selected, he could look across to the Long Island shore. The Samovar clubhouse was within half a mile of him in one direction, and the two avenues to which Langham had referred were scarcely further, in another.

In a word, he was directly in the center of the operations he wished to carry on.

He had approached the house in the character of a tramp, for as such he knew that he was less likely to be noticed.

But, as soon as he had established himself in the old mansion, he changed all that.

He was there scarcely half an hour when he again appeared and took his way toward the residence of Ralph Langham. He wished to see with his own eyes the spot where the highwayman had appeared so suddenly and mysteriously.

The tramp had been transformed into an Italian laborer, and one, moreover, who carried his effects—apparently—in a bundle which was swung upon a stick across his shoulder, for in that way he could appear to loiter wherever he pleased, while if he had carried some sort of tools, he would have felt obliged to keep moving, as if on his way to or from his work.

Under the trees, beside the hedge in front of the Langham residence, he slowed down his pace, and then his keen eyes traveled from the hedge to the trees, and from the trees back to the hedge again in rapid glances which comprehended everything within his range of vision.

Not quite twenty-four hours had elapsed since Ralph Langham had been held up and robbed so dexterously, and the detective believed that the highwayman must have left some traces behind him.

The neighborhood was so deserted that Nick argued if there were such traces, they would not have been entirely obliterated in the time. He doubted if Ralph Langham had devoted so much as a glance upon the scene that morning when he left his house to go to the city, and it was not likely that half a dozen persons had passed that way since that event.

A row of magnificent maples grew along the border of the sidewalk, and their wide-reaching branches extended, in many instances, over the hedge and into the grounds which surrounded the mansion.

Inside the grounds there were many other trees, all well attended and scrupulously cared for and trimmed; and there were many varieties, too, for Langham was something of a horticulturist, and prided himself on the beauty and excellence of his grounds and lawn.

"I wish I knew the exact spot where the robbery occurred," mused the detective. "But I can guess pretty close to it, all the same. He has to come from that direction to approach his house from the car, and he told me that he was attacked about midway between the corner and his residence."

He stepped up close to the hedge and ran his eyes rapidly along the projecting limbs of the trees which extended over the yard, and after a moment his gaze alighted upon one which seemed to be exactly what he was searching for.

"Good!" muttered the detective. "If the theory I have formed which would explain the sudden and silent appearance of the highwayman is correct, that is doubtless the very limb he made use of. Anyhow, I will have a look at it."

The trees inside the grounds shaded him from view from the house, and, as has already been said, the neighborhood seemed to be utterly deserted.

There were no prying eyes about to watch him at his work.

He walked rapidly along the concrete pavement until he was beneath the branch which had attracted his attention, and then from one of his pockets he drew a stout but pliable braided, silk rope, with which he had taken care to provide himself before he left his own house.

There was a round weight of lead woven into the silk at either end of the rope, which was, in all, about twenty-five feet in length.

With a hurried glance around him, to make doubly sure that he was still unobserved, the detective threw one end of the rope over the branch above his head.

When it fell back again into his grasp, he seized the two ends together in his grasp, and then ran up the rope like a sailor, hand over hand.

In a trice he was astride of the branch directly over the sidewalk.

He drew up the rope, folded it and returned it to his pocket, and then began an examination of the limb.

"The true spot should be directly over the hedge," he mused; and he edged his way along until he had arrived at that position, examining with great care every inch of the branch upon which he was perched.

Suddenly he came to a halt, and a smile danced in his eyes.

"I was right," he said to himself.

The reason for this expression of satisfaction was the appearance of a smoothed circle around the limb at the point he was examining.

It was such a mark as would inevitably be made by a rope, if one had been fastened there and had done service for two or more leaps over the top of the hedge.

"Good!" he muttered. "In a very few moments I will know the whole secret of the sudden and silent appearances of the highwayman; but wait, I must not go too fast."

He crawled still further out on the limb, and presently, after another rapid look around to make sure that he was unobserved, dropped from there to the ground inside the hedge.

When he alighted, he remained where he was for a moment, and then, having thrust a couple of matches into the earth where he stood, in order to mark the place where his own feet had trodden, he leaped lightly away.

Again he marked the spot, as before, where his feet touched the ground, and then he made another leap; and, after that, a third one.

He believed that now he was far enough from the hedge to begin the real work of his investigation, and in another moment he was upon his knees and making his way in ever-diminishing semicircles, toward the hedge, carefully examining every inch of the surface of the ground as he proceeded.

Every now and then, while he worked, he uttered a slight exclamation of interest, and bent closer over his employment.

Here was a spot where a foot had trod.

The grass was young and tender, and under the thick foliage of the trees, rather thin, the soil under it soft and pliable, and readily took any impression placed upon it.

To inexperienced eyes there would have been nothing observable—ay, even to eyes abnormally keen there might have appeared no evidence of footmarks on the sod and soil if they had not been diligently searched for.

But Nick Carter was upon his hands and knees; his eyes were close to the ground; his right hand held a powerful magnifying glass, which multiplied a hundredfold every twist of a blade of grass, every indentation in the soil, and every added greenness to the vegetable growth where the pressure of a foot had brought the juices to the surface.

When, in his search, he arrived at a point which was directly beneath the overhanging branch of the tree, he studied for a long time in one particular spot.

At a point under the projecting hedge, he again devoted extra time to his researches; and here he discovered much which interested him.

The lawn mower had not done its work thoroughly under the margin of the hedge, and the blades of grass were longer—and, because of the dense shade, proportionately more tender.

Each one had its story to relate to the detective, and he read them as he would have perused the pages of a printed book.

Now and then, while he worked, he raised his eyes to the hedge itself, and carefully regarded that; and once, he picked something up in his fingers, which had clung to it, and wrapped whatever it was carefully around the index finger of his left hand; again he discovered something on the ground which he transferred to one of his pockets.

An hour passed after he dropped from the limb into the yard, before he turned away from that immediate locality under the hedge; and, when he did so, it was to make his way along the margin of the hedge, close to it, and toward the corner where the grounds abutted on the avenue.

He proceeded very slowly in that direction, also, and yet much more rapidly than he had gone before; and at last he arrived at the corner.

There was a thick spruce there, and its heavily feathered branches came down close to the ground, so that the ends of them touched it; but the limbs themselves grew out from the trunk at least three feet higher, thus affording a perfect shelter for any person who cared to hide beneath it.

Nick thought it as good a place as any in which to think over what he had already accomplished, and he entered the feathered bower.

But he had scarcely poked his head through the place when he paused and smiled.

"Good!" he said. "Here is where they waited; and here," he continued, picking up a burnt match as he spoke, "is where one of them indulged in a smoke to while away the time. And he smoked a pipe, too."

There were two spots where the man had knocked out the ashes of his pipe, and where the hot cinders from it had burnt out a small space in the dried spruce needles with which the ground in there was covered.

There were also three burned matches, and two places where some grains of tobacco had been spilled upon the ground.

"I think my work in here is about done," said the detective. "I have got through here sooner than I ex-

quest, and I have discovered a great deal more than I dared to hope for."

He left his hiding place then, and made his way along the hedge beside the avenue until he was some distance from Tucker's Lane, and then he found another over hanging limb, threw his rope over it, climbed up, hand over hand, as before, and presently swung himself to the walk, outside.

He had been engaged in his researches so long that he was not surprised, as he approached the corner, to discover Chick and Ralph Langham as they crossed the avenue and walked rapidly toward the mansion.

Nick smiled when he remembered that Ralph Langham believed at that moment that he had Nick Carter in person beside him, and that he was to introduce the great detective in person to his friends at the club, a couple of hours later.

He wondered what the young millionaire would have thought could he have realized that at that instant it was not Nick Carter who walked beside him, but that the detective in reality, thirty or forty rods away, was smiling upon him in the guise of an Italian laborer.

Nick hastened to the corner when the two men passed it, and, as they turned in at the gate of Langham's residence, Chick looked back for an instant, for he more than half suspected that his chief was not far distant.

In that quick glance a signal passed between the detective and his assistant which the latter thoroughly understood.

And then, as soon as they had entered the grounds and disappeared, Nick wrote a hurried note upon a slip of paper, and, having wadded it into a ball, threw it under the hedge. It was intended for Chick's eyes as soon as he could find an opportunity to leave the house long enough to possess himself of it.

CHAPTER V.

A WOMAN HIGHWAYMAN.

Half-past two o'clock in the morning.

Nick Carter stood just outside the Samovar clubhouse, waiting.

He had been there since two o'clock, but it was not until three that a side door opened and a figure came out, which made its way rapidly across the lawn toward the very tree under which the detective had taken his stand.

"I could not get out a minute sooner," said Chick, for it was he, "and I had to pretend that I was very tired, in order to stop their endless talk, at that."

"How they have all gone now, eh?" said Nick.

"Yes; there isn't a soul inside the clubhouse save the servants. I happen to be the only guest to-night. The others have all gone home.

"I suppose it was the first time they ever had an opportunity to talk with a real detective," laughed Nick.

"Yes; and particularly with Nick Carter."

"There seemed to be a lot of the members present to-night," said Nick. "I have counted fifteen who have left since midnight."

"Sure; and they were all there to meet you."

"So every person of understanding age in the neighborhood knows that Nick Carter has been engaged to run down the highwayman, eh?"

"Sure thing."

"Well, I don't know that I am so sorry for that, when all is said. Since I am working under cover while you appear in my place in the open, that very fact may work to our benefit. In fact, I have very good reason to think it will."

"You have already discovered something, then?"

"I have discovered a lot, Chick. But come; we can't talk here. I will take you across lots to my Bronx residence. I have managed to fix myself very comfortably over here, in one of the city's deserted houses. Come; I'll show it to you. But, I say, Chick!"

"Well?"

"Before I forget it, I want to give you a warning."

"What about?"

"There is danger in the part you are playing."

"How so?"

"This is a slick proposition we are up against. I shouldn't wonder, since they are aware that Nick Carter is on the track, and believe him to be in full view, so to speak, at the club, if they should try to 'do' you, lad."

"All right. Let 'em."

The two walked on in silence after that, for the path was narrow and dark and they were obliged to move in single file.

But presently they arrived at the old house where Nick had taken up his quarters, and were soon snugly housed in the room which he had rendered habitable for his purposes.

"There," said Nick. "You see, I have made things quite comfortable here. Not a shred of light can pierce to the outside, either, so if any person should happen to pass in the neighborhood, which is not likely— "

"Unless it might be our friend, the highwayman, himself; eh?"

"I have thought of that. But even so, if the highwaymen and there are two, Chick—if they should pass this way, they will see nothing to attract their attention. More than that, this room being way at the top of the house, in one corner, and in a wing, is so isolated that, even if anybody should enter the house for any purpose, they would not be likely to discover that I am stopping here."

"So I see."

"Well, you got my note that I left under the hedge, all right, I see."

"Sure."

"I thought it well to post you to-night. I suppose the chaps up at the clubhouse have asked you for theories to-night, till you couldn't rest; eh?"

"I wish you might have heard them."

"Well, I don't."

"Tell me what you have discovered already, Nick. I'll confess I'm mighty curious."

"I have discovered that there are two highwaymen who work together. Of course, we knew that much from what Langham has already told me; but one of them is a woman."

"Eh? A woman!"

"Yes. Chick, before I go any further directly in this matter, I want to call your attention to something. You remember, of course, that woman, Agnes Marlow, whom I chased out upon the Brooklyn Bridge, and who leaped from it into the East River?"

"I should say so!"

"And do you remember that I told you afterward that, when she turned, in William Street, to run up the stairs onto the bridge, I thought I saw a rope in her hands?"

"Yes."

"And do you recall that, two or three days after that, one of the papers announced that a rope had been discovered, dangling from the bridge, over the water, at about the point where she leaped off?"

"Of course I do."

"Well, I am calling your attention to the matter so particularly because I have got it into my head that the rope in question and this highwayman business have some connection."

"How in the world can that be so?"

"You will understand when I have finished my explanation."

"All right, Nick; but——"

"Never mind the 'buts'; listen."

"I'm listening."

"That little article in the paper about the rope—it wasn't more than half a stick of type—stated that the police on the bridge believed that the rope was an evidence of a suicide, although no trace had been discovered that any such attempt had been made."

"Yes, I remember."

"It interested me sufficiently so that I went to the police station to which the rope was taken, and examined it."

"Did you? You did not tell me about it."

"No. That was a mighty peculiar rope, Chick."

"How so?"

"There was only about thirty feet of it, all told, and it had been broken, showing that originally there had been much more."

"It was very light and very strong, and it was made of hundreds of strands of rubber, wound and bound together by cords. At the end of the thirty feet there was a short section of metal, which had once been a part of a spiral spring, delicately and strongly made. I suggested to the police when I examined it that somebody had been trying to invent a fire escape, and had gone upon the bridge in the night to test it.

"Now, Chick, it is my belief that that rope was originally much longer. I think that Agnes Marlow fastened one end of it to the rail of the bridge and the other end around her body before she leaped off into the space beneath her."

"By thunder, Nick——"

"Wait. The rubber and the spiral springs—and there were, no doubt, several sections of both between the two ends of the rope—were intended to break her fall, so that when she struck the water it would be with no more force than if she had jumped a comparatively short distance."

"I see."

"Well, in reality, the rope did not bear the entire strain put upon it; it broke; but, all the same, I think it saved her. I have always thought that she escaped."

"I know you have."

"You know that when I leaped into the river after her, there was a boat some distance away from me. I called to it, but the occupants of the boat did not or would not hear."

"Yes."

"I have always thought that Agnes Marlow was in that boat."

"But, Nick, that would suggest that the boat was there waiting for her to jump. She could not have known that we were to attack the schooner where we found her that night. She could not have known that we were to chase her out upon the bridge, and so have had the boat waiting there to pick her up."

"I know that. We will let it go at that."

"All right."

"I have simply drawn your attention to that affair because I believe that a rope made on the same general plan of that one, is made use of in these highway robberies we are investigating now."

"Aha! You do, eh?"

"Agnes Marlow's hair was quite individual in shade, if you will remember."

"Yes."

"It was copper red, and this woman highwayman has hair of exactly the same shade. I discovered one of them clinging to the hedge, where Langham was robbed, so I know."

"Well?"

"Now, I will tell you the story of what I have discovered."

"I wish you would."

"A man and a woman work together in these high-

way robberies. The man goes to the selected scene first—as soon after dark as it is practicable, in fact."

"To get things ready for her arrival, I suppose."

"Exactly. He is short, thickset, broad-shouldered and very strong. In this particular case he stretched himself under a spruce in one corner of the grounds, and smoked his pipe while he waited for her. And now, Chick, I can tell you just how they carried out the scene of that robbery, with every detail of it, as correctly as if I had been there to see it. You see, the ground around there is particularly propitious for signs. It has not been disturbed since they were there, and the marks which they left behind them were as legible as if there had been snow on the ground, and you could follow, in that way, every motion they made. These two people plan away ahead, when they can. They know exactly what they are doing, and how to do it, as you shall see."

CHAPTER VI.

THE DETECTIVE'S SLENDER CLEW.

"The man arrived there soon after dark," continued the detective. "He walked along the avenue almost to Langham's place before he got through the hedge, and he did that by cutting away some of the branches and twigs, so that he could push others aside, sufficiently for his purpose. As a matter of fact, he got through so deftly that he left very little evidence of what he had done, behind him.

"Having passed through into the grounds, he turned back again toward Tucker's Lane, and he searched along there until he had found a limb of one of the maples which projected over the hedge sufficiently to suit his purpose—or he had selected the limb earlier in the day, and so knew just where to find it.

"That done, he assured himself that nobody was near to surprise him at his work.

"Then, he threw a rope over the limb in question and secured one end of it to a root in the hedge. He had to dig away a place in the sod in order to do that. Here is a bit of the silk which covered the rope, which I found still clinging to the root.

"Now, the part of the rope which still hung from the limb was very short and very soon. It was evidently made of strands of rubber, or of spiral springs—at any rate, of something which possessed sufficient spring and elasticity for their purposes.

"He had previously tied a knot next to the ring in the end of the rope which hung over the limb, and he now pulled that down, and made the ring fast to the same knot where he had already fastened the anchor end of the rope. Do you follow me?"

"Yes, but I don't quite see——"

"Wait. It was considerable strength to pull that ring down and make it fast. The spring, or the elasticity of that short end of the rope, was almost great enough to have drawn a person of ordinary weight into the air. It was, for example, so great that it was all that the woman highwayman could do to hold it without being raised from her feet."

"I see the point now."

"Very well; follow me."

"Go ahead; I'm on."

"That done, all his arrangements completed, the man returned to his place beneath the spruce, which he had previously selected for a hiding place, and lighted his pipe. He was there long enough to finish half a pipeful, which had not previously been smoked out, and which he had to light twice—I found three burned matches—and to fill the bowl again and light that. But he did not smoke much of the second bowlful before he was called away."

"But he did leave the impression of his shoulders against the ground, eh?"

"Yes; and of his heels, as well. They showed him to be short and thickset and very broad in the chest and shoulders.

"Well, he smoked there until he was summoned from the outside."

"By the woman, eh?"

"Sure. She walked along past the spot where he had told her he would wait. She spoke to him. He replied. He told her to walk along the hedge toward the house until he directed her to stop."

"At the point where he had arranged the rope, eh?"

"Exactly. When they arrived at that spot, he spoke to her and she waited. Then he loosened the elastic end of the rope—the end provided with the ring. He reached over the top of the hedge with the ring in his grasp, and he had to be very strong in the wrists to do that, for the strain was great. I saw where he stood on his tiptoes in order to do it, too."

"He held it while she got a firm hold upon it, and gathered her skirts around her; and she did not have any too many skirts to gather in her grasp, as you will see presently."

"This is getting interesting, Nick. I begin to see the whole game now."

"Wait."

"Go ahead."

"He was strong enough to hold the ring of the elastic end of the rope in position until she had it firmly in her grasp. Then he loosed his hold and she leaped into the air."

"I see."

"The position of the rope and its strong elasticity, together with the leap she made, carried her bodily into the air, and over the hedge, so that she alighted on the other side of it."

"Inside the grounds."

"Yes; the prints of her little shoes—and they are small—where she alighted on the balls of her feet and then sank back upon the French heels, are there."

"Good!"

"Her companion at once relieved her of the elastic rope, and he fastened it in place again, to the root.

"She evidently did not care to crawl into his hiding place under the spruce, or there was not time, so they sat down side by side under the hedge, and conversed. The grass there is damp and sparse, so that I easily discovered that fact. It is also considerably longer, there where the mower could not reach it, so it had a plain story to tell."

"Sure."

"After a little, he left her, but before he did so, she—and here is where that remark of mine about her skirts comes in—she removed an outer garment, which was doubtless a long surtout coat, made of some light material, which enveloped her entire figure, and which, when removed, left her standing in what might appear in the dark, to be the habiliments of a man."

"Trousers, eh?"

"Yes, or knickerbockers, more likely, with a tight-fitting jersey waist, for that is the sort of costume described by Langham.

"At all events, she was ready for work. The impedimenta of useless garments was out of the way. We already know that she wore some sort of a slouch hat, and doubtless she had a belt around her waist, in which there was a pistol. She was ready, now, for the rest of the work."

"Yes."

"Her companion took the coat she had worn and hurried away, back to the hole he had made in the hedge where he entered the grounds. I had no difficulty in tracing him across the lawn among the trees."

"And that left the woman there alone."

"Sure. She waited, close to the root where the elastic rope was fastened."

"And the man went out to watch and wait for Langham?"

"Precisely. He found a convenient place where he could watch for Langham's approach. As soon as he saw him and was sure it was his man, he made some sort of signal which the woman heard and recognized. After that she had only to wait until the sound of his footsteps on the concrete walk told her that it was time to act."

"And then——?"

"And then, when the proper moment came, she released the ring from the root, seized it with both hands, leaped into the air, swung herself over the hedge, and——"

"And alighted like a feather directly in front of her victim."

"Exactly. Don't you see, Chick, that as soon as she was in the air, well over the hedge, the very direction from which she had leaped would give her the momentum to alight upon the walk directly in front of Langham. She let go her hold on the ring in the rope while she was still in the air. By the time she touched the ground, the revolver was ready in her grasp, and before Langham knew that anything had happened, she was there and he was looking into the muzzle of her weapon."

"No wonder they call her the Phantom Highwayman."

"Right you are."

"And the man——"

"The man, her companion, had stolen along after Langham. He was ready at hand when she held our friend up. He probably wore rubber soles on his shoes, so Langham heard no sound but his voice. Now, the rest of it is easy."

"Sure."

"As soon as the robbery was consummated, Langham was ordered to remain where he was for a time, and then to continue on to his house without daring to look behind him. In that time the woman had sped to the corner, where she doubtless found her outside garment ready for her; and now, you must remember another thing."

"What is that?"

"When the woman leaped the hedge, she released her hold upon the elastic rope while she was still in the air. The spring of it would take it off the limb into the grounds on the opposite side of the hedge."

"Yes."

"The anchor end of the rope was still fastened to the root, in the hedge."

"Yes."

"The man had made a small hole through the hedge through which he could force his hand and recover possession of the rope. He had only to unfasten it and draw it toward him. In a moment it was in his grasp. The work was done. He stole silently away."

"And he had not been seen at all. The victim of the robbery had not had so much as a glimpse of him."

"Right you are! He had no fear of identification. Neither had the woman. They met somewhere near by, off, and, arm in arm, doubtless, proceeded on their way, rejoicing. She had resumed the outward appearance of a woman. There was absolutely nothing to connect them with the robbery, even if there had been a pursuit."

"Slick, wasn't it?"

"You bet."

"And it is because of that rope that you connect this affair with that leap from the bridge, eh?"

"Partly; but there is still another reason—or perhaps more than one."

"What are they?"

"I remember that woman, Chick. She was as daring as the devil; so is this one. She was slight of build; so is this one. She was alert, quick, crafty and cool in danger; so is this one. She was, like her brother, a na-

tural-born crook; so I believe this one to be. She was a copper-haired blonde; so is this one. She had a foot almost too small for her size; so has this one. She wore beautifully made French boots, fitted with flat buttons; so does this one, for here is one of the buttons. I picked it up under the hedge. And, Chick, that schooner, where we found her, was preparing for some rendezvous along the Sound, and this woman—well, she is very much in evidence in this neighborhood, to say the least. It is a slender clew, but it seems a good one."

CHAPTER VII.

THE DETECTIVE NAILS A LIE.

"Now, Chick," said the detective, when he had done, "I am going to change places with you for a short time. I want to see the inside of that club, and also to inspect, for my own amusement, the members of it."

"And what do you wish me to do in the meantime?"

"Anything you please. You can become the Italian laborer, if you like, or adopt any other costume you prefer. You will find everything needful in that bag."

"All right. I will look about me a bit during the day. When do you want to change back again?"

"Make it about this same hour to-morrow morning—twenty-four hours from now."

"Very good. I'll be here."

At the clubhouse that morning—which, by the way, happened to be Sunday—Nick Carter was rather surprised, when he descended to the breakfast room, to find several members of the club there awaiting him.

He had, of course, arrayed himself in precisely the same costume that Chick had worn the preceding evening, so that none of them suspected that he was not the same individual who had been introduced there by Ralph Langham.

He was amused, too, by the evident air of expectancy about them all when they greeted him while he was ordering his breakfast.

"I wonder," he mused, "if they thought I would corner the highwayman during the night and bring him in to breakfast with me."

One of the members took a seat at the same table with the detective, opposite him, and began a conversation.

"Well, Mr. Carter," he said, "have you decided upon any plan of operation yet?"

"Not especially," replied Nick.

"You see, don't you, that we are all very much interested in the outcome of your search?"

"Naturally so, I suppose."

"We have been wondering if there is not something which some of us can do to assist you."

"Is indeed! Are you all anxious to become amateur detectives?"

"Well, not exactly that, you know; but——"

"But you would like to be of assistance?"

"Yes."

"Then, if one of you would kindly go out and get yourself robbed by the Phantom Highwayman, so that I could have a fresh clew, I would suggest that."

"Why, haven't you heard?"

"Heard what?" asked Nick.

"I don't suppose you have, though, for you have not been out of the clubhouse since you entered it last night with Langham."

"Heard what?" repeated the detective.

"That there was another robbery last night?"

"No; I had not heard it."

"Well, there was one."

"Indeed! Who was it?"

"Bob Conners met the highwayman."

"Have I made the acquaintance of Mr. Conners?"

"No. I don't think so. He was not here when you arrived last night. He had just gone, I think; and he has not yet been here this morning. I told him, however, that you were here, and he said he would come around as soon as possible after breakfast. He was just about to have it when I saw him."

"Ah! It is you, then, who received the information?"

"Yes. I met him on the street. He was going to the drug store for something."

"And he told you about the robbery?"

"Yes; said it was just the same as the others, you know about."

"When he arrives, I would like to see him."

"Certainly."

"Will you pardon me if I inquire your name, sir? You know I met several of your members last night, and——"

"I am Richard Barlow."

"Barlow," repeated Nick, after him, giving him a quick glance out of the corner of his eyes, which was, however, unobserved by his *vis-à-vis*; and, to himself, he added: "It is a short shift from Marlow to Barlow."

Then, aloud, he continued:

"Are you an old member of the club, Mr. Barlow?"

"Oh, about a year."

"Your residence is near here, I suppose?"

The question was asked easily, while Nick was engaged in dissecting a chop. It had not at all the appearance of inquisitiveness.

His *vis-à-vis* smiled.

"I am a bachelor, and have no residence," he said. "I have a couple of rooms at The Elms, which is really a boarding house. I stay here at the club a great deal. In fact, I'm a sort of Bedouin, I take it."

"You take your meals here, I suppose, rather than at a boarding house?"

"Oh, yes; although they are very good there, at that. I take them wherever I happen to be at," as a Southerner would say.

"Are you a Southerner? You have something of the enunciation, I perceive."

"I was born in the South."

Nick was silent while he dissected a second chop; but he was thinking:

"Short, thickset, broad in the chest and shoulders, strong and wide and big hands, not a permanent resident of the neighborhood, about a year in the club—and—Barlow."

"Here is Conners, now," said his companion at the table, interrupting the detective's train of thought. "He will tell you all about the robbery. Hello, Conners."

"'Morning, Bar. Warm; eh?"

"Come over here, Conners. Mr. Carter, Mr. Conners, the gentleman I was just telling you about. He met the Phantom last night, you know. He was touched for quite a wad, too. Eh, Conners?"

"How are you, Mr. Carter? Yaas; two thou. Beastly bore—this being held up—you know. I say, Job"—to the servant—"bring me a highball. Funny chap—that highwayman—Mr. Carter. I'm told—you're going—to nail him—eh?"

"Tell me about your case, Mr. Conners," replied Nick.

"It isn't much to tell—you know. Went to a little poker party—round at Simmons'. Started home 'bout midnight. Chap dropped down, out—of the sky—or a tree—or somewhere—right before me. Had a gun, and all that. Never said a word. Chap behind did the biz. Went through me like grease. Took a thou' with me to the game. Won another, so had two. Phantom got both."

"Anything else?"

"Yaas. Watch and chain—not worth much—couple o' hundred, maybe."

"Were you frightened?"

"No—surprised—a little. Wasn't looking for it."

"Can you describe him?"

"Little chap—might ha' been a boy—for all I know. Might ha' been a woman dressed as a boy, too. Knickerbockers, you know. Tight-fitting jacket, like a sweater or a jersey. Wore a mask. Did the thing up brown. Bet your boots. Job; another highball."

"What about the other one?"

"Can't say. Never saw him. Felt him, though, and heard him. Went through me quicker'n scat."

"Would you know his voice if you heard it again?"

"Hardly. Doubt it. Sounded something like Bar's, there; eh, Bar? How's that?"

"That's a fine compliment!" laughed Barlow. "I hope you'll have a chance to make a closer guess one."

"Maybe so. If you were half as slick at that game as you are at poker——"

"I'd make a good phantom; eh?"

"Dandy. I say, Carter, if you'll catch that chap, I'll add a thou to the reward. Job, er, fetch me another highball."

"Thank you," replied Nick, dryly. "Where were you when you met the highwayman?"

"Almost in front of Langham's house."

"Which Langham?"

"Ralph. Show you the spot—presently—if—— I say, Job, open a fresh bottle of that Scotch; this tastes as if it had water in it—if you care to walk around there—with me."

"I'll go now, if you are ready," said Nick, rising. "I have finished my breakfast, and I feel like taking a walk."

"All right. Come on."

As the two were leaving the clubhouse together, Nick could scarcely refrain from laughing outright when he noticed that half a dozen of the loungers around the club were following them; but he raised no objection, and so the procession took up its way toward the spot where the last hold up had occurred.

As they were passing Langham's gate, they encountered that gentleman on his way out, and Nick, after greeting him, told him what had occurred and asked him to accompany them.

The detective had more than half suspected that the scene of the robbery referred to by Conners would be the same one he had examined the preceding evening, and he was, therefore, not surprised when Conners halted under the selfsame tree which he had already investigated so thoroughly.

"It was right here," he said. "I live yonder, in that direction," and he pointed vaguely toward the south. "Simmons lives yonder," and he pointed toward the north, "so, you see, I was passing here when it happened."

"Thank you," said Nick. "That is all for the present. Now, I am going to ask you all to wait here for a moment, and not to follow me."

He turned back to the gate and disappeared through it, much to the evident surprise of his companions, who would unquestionably have followed him had he not particularly requested them not to do so.

The detective passed inside the grounds and skirted the hedge to the point under the tree, and there, dropping upon his knees, he hurriedly examined the root of the hedge to which the elastic rope had been fastened when Ralph Langham was robbed.

"Conners has lied to me," he muttered, as he rose again. "The highwayman has not been here again."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MAN WHO WAS NOT ROBBED.

There was not a sign on the ground near the hedge that the highwayman had been there a second time, and Nick was positive that the robbery could not have been committed, as Conners, with the assistance and sugges

tion of Barlow, had described it, without visible traces of the incident remaining.

It must be remembered how carefully he had studied the grounds inside the hedge, the preceding evening.

There was scarcely a blade of grass there which he had not investigated, and if there had been others upon the ground since he had viewed it, he would have known it instantly.

But the grass had not been trampled a second time. There were no new marks of footprints against the soft earth—in fact, there was nothing to indicate that the Phantom Highwayman had appeared on that spot more than once.

While Nick was rising from his knees and preparing to rejoin his companions outside the fence, he was thinking deeply.

"My theory of the robberies suggests that there is an accomplice of the highwayman, or the highwaymen, who has access to the club," was the thought that was passing through his mind, "and I have already more than half connected this chap Barlow with that individual. And now comes Conners, who was not robbed, or, who if he was robbed, has some reason for lying about the locality where it happened. I cannot quite see through the game, unless, for the benefit of myself as a detective, they have agreed together to make up this story merely as a huge joke upon me. But I hardly think that."

He turned and walked away to the gate, and there encountered Langham again.

He was far enough removed from the others so that Nick had time to make a hasty remark to him without being overheard.

"Let the others walk on ahead toward the club," he said, rapidly. "I want to talk with you alone a few moments."

This arrangement was made without trouble, and after a moment the procession was on its way back to the club with Nick Carter and Ralph Langham walking together, far in the rear of the others.

"I suppose they told you why we all came over here to see the spot this morning, didn't they, Langham?" asked Nick, by way of beginning the conversation.

"Sure. Conners says he was robbed in the very same place where I was, night before last."

"Have you told anybody, as yet, that you were robbed at all?"

"Not a living human being save yourself."

"Eh? Not even the members of your household?"

"I have told nobody but yourself; nobody."

"Good."

"You don't want me to speak of it, eh?"

"No. I want you to forget it, just as though it never happened."

"I won't agree to do that; but I will promise not to tell about it."

"That is what I mean. Now I want to ask you some questions about some of the members of your club."

"Go ahead, then."

"Who is Richard Barlow?"

"Eh? Barlow? Why, he is just Barlow; that is all."

"Does he belong around here? Do you know any of his relatives, or anything about him more than that he perhaps seems a good fellow and is a member of your club?"

"Why, no; now that you speak about it I don't know as I do."

"Who brought him into the club?"

"Conners, I think."

"Who is Conners?"

"Conners? He's the big fellow who——"

"Oh, I know who he is when I look at him; but I wish to know who he is in effect."

"I don't think I quite understand what you are driving at."

"I'm driving at Conners. I want to know what he is as well as who he is."

"Why, Carter?"

"Well, for one reason, he has just told me an absurd lie."

"He is quite capable of doing that. That is one of his ideas of a good joke."

"All the same, tell me about him."

"Why, Conners is all right. He was born in the house where he now lives, and I think his father was before him. They have no end of money. Conners himself is a lazy brute—a harmless sort of a wag who thinks more of a Scotch highball than he does of his immortal soul. But there isn't a wrong thing about him."

"Then why did he lie to me about that robbery?"

"Are you sure that he did so?"

"Just as sure as I am that I can see his almost three hundred pounds of flesh looming up ahead of me at this moment."

"Do you mean to say that he was not robbed by the highwayman, last night?"

"I mean to say that he was not robbed at the place where he says he met the highwayman—if he was robbed at all."

"I don't know why he should lie about it to you."

"Neither do I; that is why I am asking you about him."

"It is probably one of his 'huge' jokes."

"Rather a poor one, I think."

"Most of his jokes are poor. But how do you know he was not robbed at that place, if he really was robbed anywhere?"

"It is not necessary to explain that, more than to assure you that it is a part of my profession to know such things."

"Well, I would suggest that you ask him about it."

"I mean to do that very thing, presently. But first I wish to be assured that you are positive that he is straight."

"What do you mean, Carter?"

"I mean that I want to know if you are positive that he is honest, upright and square."

"I would almost stake my life upon it."

"Can he be relied upon if he gives his word for anything?"

"He's as safe as a church."

"Good. I'm going to halt on this corner ahead of us. I wish you would walk up to the others, call Conners aside and ask him if he will step back here and join me. Tell him that I know about a new brand of Scotch, if you think that will interest him. At all events, send him back here."

Five minutes later Conners left the group ahead of Nick, and turning, strolled back to where the detective was awaiting him.

"Langham said—you wanted—to see me," he panted.

He was so immense in size and his stomach was so ponderous that one wondered in looking at him how he ever succeeded in getting his breath at all; but rollicking good nature was evident all over him. It shone in his face and oozed from his pores.

"Yes," replied Nick. "Do you mind turning and walking in the opposite direction with me for a little way?"

The detective saw that Barlow had come to a halt, and that the others had stopped beside him, evidently to await their approach, and he had no wish to rejoin the club contingent at that moment.

"Not at all—old chap—anything in the world—that I can—do for you—you know."

"I wish to ask you a serious question, Mr. Conners, and one which may offend you, for it will sound a little harsh at first."

"Eh? All right. Fire away. I'm bomb proof, you know. What's it about?"

"I want to know why you lied to me," said Nick, bluntly.

He was watching Conners out of the corner of his eye, and he saw the big man wince, as if he had received a blow.

Conners was silent for a moment without offering to respond to the query, but Nick waited patiently, determined that he would make no further remark until he had received a reply to his question.

"That is a mite—harsh, you know," said Conners, presently.

"Do you mind answering?" said Nick.

"I'm willing—just to let that question of yours—settle before—replying. You know—I'm not accustomed—to being called—a liar, Carter."

"When a person tells lies, he should accustom himself to being accused of it," replied Nick, calmly. "You know that you have lied to me this morning, and I have asked you a plain question about it. If you do not care to explain, we will let it go at that."

"How do you know I lied to you, Mr. Carter?"

"That is begging the question, Mr. Conners."

"You mean about that robbery business, I suppose."

"Why, yes. Have you told me other lies than that one?" retorted Nick.

"Look here, Mr. Carter," said Conners, suddenly, stopping in the middle of the walk and half turning so that he faced the detective, "I've got a temper inside this fat head of mine, and——"

"I don't care a rap, Mr. Conners, if you have ten thousand tempers inside that fat head of yours, and if you lose every one of them during this conversation. I approached the subject as delicately as I could, believing after what Langham has said, that you would explain at once. You have not met me halfway, and now I will put my question in the form of a very plain statement. I have known you something less than two hours, and in that time I have found you to be a liar. Now you can take it or leave it. You can explain, or you need not do so, just as you please. It makes no difference to me whether you are offended or not; so now, Mr. Conners, it is up to you."

For a moment it seemed as if Conners' hugs bulk would burst. His face became the color of a peony, and his breath came in gasps; but the fit of anger passed and ended in a chuckling laugh.

"I wish you were wrong and that I hadn't lied—about that business," he said.

"No doubt," responded Nick, dryly.

"Because then—you know—I could smash—you in the jaw for what—you have said. But—inasmuch as you are right—and I did lie—to you, I can't—very well do it—can I?"

"No; not very well."

"You see, Carter—I was not robbed—at all, you know."

"So I suspected."

"It was all a joke—just a joke, you know."

"All arranged, I suppose, when you met Barlow while you were on your way to the drug store this morning, wasn't it?"

"Eh? Drug store? I didn't go to any drug store this morning. Who said anything about a drug store?"

"Barlow. He said he met you on the street and that you told him about the robbery."

"Did he? Then I'm not—the only liar in the case. Barlow—came to my house."

"To suggest this story?"

"Yes. He said—that there was a detective chap—at the club, and that—he wanted to play a game—on him.

He suggested the whole thing—and I just carried it out, you know."

"So you weren't robbed at all?"

"Narry a rob, Carter. But I say! I'd like to know how you nailed—the lies so awfully sudden, you know."

"That is a part of my profession."

"Well, look here! I beg your pardon—old fellow. I'm a chump-etty chump, that's what I am. I apologize. Let's call it square, Carter, and—begin over again. What—do you say?"

"Gladly."

"I'll explain the whole thing to the boys when——"

"That is precisely what I do not wish you to do. Let them think that I am deceived."

"Eh? All right. Only—— "

"Never mind the 'only.' That is what I wish you to do. Let them think what they please about the matter. The thing I wish you to do just now, is to tell me all you know about your friend, Richard Barlow—the gentleman who put up this job."

Nick noticed that Conners started, and flushed up again, and so he added, quickly:

"And I think you know more about him than you have ever cared to tell, Mr. Conners."

CHAPTER IX.

THE MYSTERY OF THE YACHT "MASCOT."

Conners was silent for a moment, and then he blurted out:

"I begin to have a whole lot—more respect for this—detective business than—I had before I met you, Carter."

"No doubt."

"You seem to know a devil of a lot, don't you?"

"Possibly."

"And you think that I know a lot about Barlow—which I haven't told; eh?"

"Probably."

"Why do you think that?"

"Oh, there are several reasons; but one will do. You were his sponser at the club, weren't you?"

"I was; but that was before I knew—much about him—you know. I had met him—a few times. He asked—about the club and expressed a wish—to join, so I took him—under my wing, you know."

"Who introduced you to Barlow?"

"Nobody. We scraped up an—acquaintance, in fact."

"And I have no doubt that he did most of the scraping, didn't he?"

"I don't remember—as to that part—of it. I have always found him a—jolly good fellow at that."

"Have you ever met any friends of his who are not [illegible] the club or by any of the members of the club?" asked the detective, making a guess out of whole cloth and sending in the question utterly at random. And then, before Conners could reply, he added:

"I will be more explicit. Have you ever met a—er—lady friend of Barlow's? A very pretty woman, with hair like polished copper-plate, and the prettiest little feet you ever saw?"

"Well, for Heaven's sake, Carter, how in the world did you know that?" gasped Conners, for once forgetting to pant as he talked.

"I didn't know it; I only guessed it."

"You're a regular Sherlock Holmes."

"Not on your life, Mr. Conners. Sherlock Holmes is a fake and I'm a fact; very much of a fact, as you will presently discover."

"You're a corker, anyhow; a regular crackajack!"

"Thank you. Now, would you mind telling me the lady's name?"

"What! Don't you know what that is?"

"Not unless it happens to be Agnes."

"Gee whizz! Well, it does happen to be Agnes."

"I thought so; and is Barlow tacked on at the end of it?"

"Sure. She's his sister, you know."

"Oh, is she? No; I didn't know that. I know that she once had a brother, but this Richard Barlow is not that one. He may be another brother, but——"

"But what?"

"I doubt it, that's all."

"Then if he isn't a brother, what is he?"

"You can search me, Mr. Conners. Perhaps the word husband would fill the bill. Can you tell me where this interesting young woman resides?"

"Why, on her private yacht. It's a dandy, too. Ninety feet over all—triple expansion engines—fitted up like a palace. Out of sight. I've—taken three trips to the city and return—on the *Mascot*."

"Is that the name of the yacht?"

"Yes."

"Do you happen to know where she is now? The yacht, I mean?"

"I haven't an idea. She was here day—before yesterday. I was aboard of her—where she was anchored—out in the cove—all night, night before last."

"Indeed!" said Nick; and he remembered that that was the time when Ralph Langham was held up and robbed near his own door. "What time did you go aboard of her?"

"Oh, early in the afternoon."

"And you remained all night?"

"Yes; came ashore early the next morning. Soon after sunrise, in fact."

"Was Barlow there?"

"Sure. He took me out to her."

"And Miss Agnes? Was she there also?"

"Not when I first boarded the yacht. She had gone

ashore and driven over toward White Plains to spend the day with some friends."

Nick Carter smiled broadly. He began to understand the game now.

"Let me see if I can tell you what happened," he said, coolly.

"Why, nothing happened. I don't understand."

"Oh, yes; something happened. I will explain."

"I wish you would."

"Barlow took you out to the yacht during the afternoon. We will say that you ate something, drank a whole lot of highballs, and possibly whiled away the time at some game of cards until somewhere about seven o'clock; eh? And that then, Barlow excused himself and went ashore to meet his 'sister,' eh? And that she was late in arriving, so that you did not really see her until after nine—or was it near ten o'clock before she came off to the yacht; eh?"

"By the great caliph of Bagdad, Carter, one would think that you had been passing your time in spying upon my actions! How the devil did you know all that? Or has Barlow already told you?"

"No; he has told me nothing. But have I guessed what happened?"

"Exactly. To a dot."

"And it was so late when she did arrive, and you all had such a pleasant evening together, and you swallowed so many highballs and ate so much, and felt so good and all that, that you were prevailed upon, without much difficulty, to remain overnight."

"To tell you the truth, Carter, I don't remember much about the last hour or two, that evening; but I did stay all night. There are two very comfortable staterooms on the yacht. I had one of them, and Barlow said he slept in the cabin. He woke me and he also came ashore with me."

"Did you see Miss Barlow that morning?"

"Sure. She was up before we were."

"Were you sober enough to remember how she looked when she came aboard the evening before?"

"Certainly."

"Can you tell me how she was dressed?"

"Let me see——"

"Wait; did she wear a long coat or wrap which covered her costume entirely?"

"Yes; I think she did. Some kind of fluffy stuff, like thin silk; and cut—well, if a man had worn it—I should have called it a surtout."

"And a sort of Rough Rider hat?"

"Yes; with an eagle's feather in it. I remember that because I made fun of the feather."

"What was the matter with it?"

"Nothing. I just made fun—of it, that's all. Just as a chap will poke fun at the moon—when he's had too many highballs, you know."

"Have you ever visited the yacht before?"

"Lots of times."

"Ever stayed all night before?"

"Yes; half a dozen times, or more."

"Conners, are you in love with Miss Agnes Barlow?"

"Well—you know, old chap—it's sort of getting along that way. I'm—not badly hurt—as yet, but I'm a candidate."

"You haven't asked her to marry you, have you?"

"No; but I've thought about it."

"Seriously?"

"Quite so."

"You say that you have remained aboard the yacht overnight, several times?"

"Yes; a good many."

"Now, think well before you reply to the next question. Have you noticed that Miss Agnes has been absent part of the evening, almost every time you have been there? Or, if not that, then that somehow you have gotten your load on very early in the evening, so that you turned in about midnight, or before?"

"Humph! I don't pretend to know why you ask those questions, but I think you're off this time. She has been to visit that friend over toward White Plains once or twice before, and I think as a matter of fact that we have always turned in rather early, every time I have been there, with the exception——"

"With the exception of night before last, eh?"

"Yes."

"It was very late, then, wasn't it?"

"About three in the morning."

"And that night," murmured Nick, as if speaking to himself, but purposely so that his companion would overhear the words, "was the only time, as nearly as I can find out, when the Phantom Highwayman has performed the hold-up act before nine o'clock in the evening."

"Look here, Carter," panted Conners, "what in the devil do you mean?"

"Would you like me to reply to that question quite frankly?" asked Nick.

"Yes."

"May I trust you to keep silent until I give you permission to speak?"

"Yes."

"Then I mean, Mr. Conners, that it is my opinion that you have been seriously considering the wisdom of asking the Phantom Highwayman to become your wife."

"Good God!" said Conners, staring.

CHAPTER X.

NICK CARTER'S CLEVER SCHEME.

The two men had turned in their walk, and retraced their steps toward the club, and they were now nearly there.

Nick could see that there were a dozen or more members gathered on the veranda awaiting their approach, and so he said:

"There are just two or three more things I wish to say before we rejoin our friends, Mr. Conners."

"All right, Carter. That last remark—of yours rather knocked me—out, don't you know."

"Forget it," said Nick; "at least, for the present. I don't wish you to manifest by word or act, that you know or suspect a thing about what I have said to you."

"I won't."

"Above all, keep your manner toward Barlow the same that it has always been."

"I'll do it."

"Where does the yacht anchor, when she comes here, to this neighborhood?"

"In Baxter's Cove. It's all right there when the wind is not from the southeast."

"I know the place. When is the yacht expected here again?"

"Sometime to-morrow. I'm invited aboard of her for dinner to-morrow night."

"Is that so? Then you may bank upon it that the Phantom Highwayman will perform another hold up sometime to-morrow night—and I think I'll be present."

"Great snakes! old man——"

"Conners," said Nick, not taking notice of his remark, "I wish you weren't so infernally big."

"So do I—with all my heart. It's a great bore to have—all this flesh to carry—about with me, you know."

"I didn't meant it exactly that way. If you weren't so big—if I could duplicate your appearance, for instance, I'd get you to change places with me to-morrow night, and let me go to that dinner engagement in your place; but that is out of the question. I will have to think out another plan."

"If there is anything I can do, just mention it, old fellow."

"I will. There is just one thing now, however."

"What is that?"

"I wish you would be particular to see me for a moment after you have discovered at just what time you will go out to the yacht to-morrow."

"All right. I'll do that."

When the detective and Conners arrived upon the veranda of the clubhouse, they were met by a general smile all around, and it was Barlow who greeted them first.

"Well, Mr. Carter," he said, "I suppose you have got all the particulars from Conners, and are now ready to make upon the person of the Phantom Highwayman; eh?"

"Oh, yes," replied Nick, smiling toward him; "and I will promise you, Mr. Barlow, that when I make the capture, I will see to it that you have an invitation to be present at the ceremony. I will try to have you right there on the spot."

"Aw, indeed! Thanks, awfully, I'm sure."

He laughed long and loud, but Nick could detect a tinge of uneasiness in his hilarity, all the same.

After a few moments of idle chat, Nick called out across the veranda to Langham.

"Will you take a short walk with me?" he asked.

"Certainly," replied Langham.

A moment later they were on the avenue together—and it must be remembered that avenue in this case refers merely to a well-paved thoroughfare, bordered by trees and hedges, where the residences were few and far between, where all were palatial structures, and where each one stood well back from the roadway.

"Where shall we go?" asked Langham.

"Nowhere, in particular. I want to ask you some questions. And after a little, I want you to leave me on some corner and go home to your house for an hour or two. At the end of that time I will meet you again at the club."

"All right. What are the questions?"

"I'll begin them by making a statement. There will be another hold up somewhere about this neighborhood, by the Phantom Highwayman, to-morrow night."

"The blazes there will! How do you know that?"

"We will say that I guessed it."

"Perhaps Conners told you."

"Perhaps he did; but if he did, he has no idea of it."

"Well, what are the questions?"

"To-morrow will be Monday, and Tuesday will be the first day of the month; eh?"

"Yes; to be sure. I had forgotten it."

"Now, once in a while, in a community like this one, there is a man somewhere who has a considerable amount of money to pay off in cash on the first day of each month; and such a man, living a considerable distance from a bank, is apt to bring the money home with him the preceding night; eh? Isn't that true?"

"Quite true, I've no doubt."

"Do you happen to know of a man in this locality who answers to that description?"

"Can't say I do."

"Think a moment. You need not confine yourself to your club, or to your personal acquaintances. I just want to find such a man, whether he is a day laborer, a contractor, or no matter what his calling may be; because, Langham, that is the man who is going to be robbed to-morrow night. He will have his pockets filled with money to pay off with the next day. Isn't there a building operation, or——"

"Why, yes. So there is. There is the work on the Cunningham place. It has been going on for a year or more. Graeme is the architect, and, I believe he does pay off once a month. In fact, I know that he does. He has told me that he has entire charge of the work.

and that he squares everything the first of every month. Graeme is a member of the club, too."

"I thought as much. Is he at the club to-day?"

"No; but he usually drops in for an hour or so, Sunday evenings. He'll be there to-night without fail."

"Describe him, please."

"Why, he's about your height and weight, I should say, and——"

"Good! Could you induce him to walk home with you when he is ready to leave the club?"

"Certainly. We are warm friends."

"Then I wish you would do so; and tell him not to mention the fact, either. Just stroll out together, naturally. About what time will that be, do you think?"

"Oh, eleven o'clock."

"Make it earlier, if you can. Make it at——"

"At nine, if you prefer."

"All right, at nine, then."

"You wish me to take him to my house?"

"Yes. I will meet you at your gate; and I will not be alone. I will have my assistant with me. He is here now, although you have not known it."

"What is the game, Carter?"

"I don't exactly know, as yet, but I'll keep you posted as it progresses. Now, if you will go to your home and remain there about an hour, I will meet you there at nine to-night. If you return to the club in the meanwhile, you can say that I've taken a run down to the city and that I'll return presently."

They parted at the corner and Nick turned into another street, after which he made his way rapidly toward the old mansion where he had established his headquarters.

He hoped that he would find Chick there, and he was not disappointed.

"Here you are, lad," he said, when he entered that upper room. "What have you been doing with yourself?"

"Oh, I've just been snooping around, looking at the scenery. There wasn't anything else to see so I came back here. There was a dandy yacht which steamed into the cove out there, about an hour ago, though."

"Ah! Did she happen to be named the *Mascot*?"

"Sure thing. Why?"

"Is she there yet?"

"No. She didn't so much as drop anchor."

"What did she do?"

"Just ran inside, lowered her tender and sent a passenger ashore, and then steamed away again."

"Gee, Chick, but I wish you had followed that passenger!"

"Well, I didn't."

"The *Mascot* is Agnes Marlow's yacht, and Agnes Marlow is the Phantom Highwayman. The passengers who came ashore was doubtless a messenger sent by her to communicate with a chap who calls himself Richard Barlow, and to make arrangements with him for robbing a young architect named Graeme, to-morrow night."

"You seem to have got things down rather fine in the time you have had," said Chick.

"Yes; but I do not know where the robbery is to take place. However, that makes no especial difference."

"You are sure that it will take place, I suppose?"

"As certain as fate. And I think I can find out where, before it happens, too."

Nick then began at the beginning and recounted to his assistant everything that had taken place since the hour of their parting; and at the conclusion, he said:

"Now, Chick, I have enough of the description of the architect, Graeme, to know that I can make myself up enough like him to do the work, and I propose to be held up in the place of him. We are to meet him, with Langham, at Langham's house, to-night, and you must resume the disguise I am now wearing and sleep at the club to-night. I've posted you about Barlow and Conners, and all that, so you will have no difficulty."

"Not the least in the world."

"I shall get my make-up as the architect down very fine to-night, so that I will have no difficulty in resuming it at the proper time. To-morrow, I will hang around here and keep a lookout for the yacht, for I mean to go aboard of her when Conners goes."

"I see."

"Barlow and the woman will come ashore to get ready for the highwayman act, sometime during the evening, and it is your game to take their trail and follow them when they land."

"I'm on, all right."

"We will get our additional pointers from Graeme to-night. We will find out from him exactly what his habits are when he returns with that money in his possession. We will know what time he arrives, and what route he takes after he leaves the car, and that will tell us pretty near where the robbery will take place, and about what time it is likely to happen."

"Sure."

"So, you see you will know about when to expect Barlow and the woman to come ashore from the yacht, and I will know what course to take after I come ashore, whether I do so before, or after them. I have only to have a saddle horse ready somewhere near here, and to ride a mile or so toward the city, to intercept the car which Graeme usually takes. Barlow will be on the watch somewhere, for Graeme, and he will pick me up instead."

"And when the hold up takes place, it will be Nick Carter they are up against, instead of the architect."

"Exactly."

"And I——"

"You will be so close behind Richard Barlow that you

will be in at the death, so to speak; and you must be there, too. I have not a doubt that the outfit would shoot, and shoot to kill, too, without hesitation, if either of them thought there was the slightest danger."

"Their game is a slick one, too, with Barlow behind and out of sight," said Chick.

"Exactly. If we can, with what Graeme tells us, select the spot where they intend to do the act, that will simplify matters considerably; but no matter what happens, remember that your part of the game is to take care of Barlow from the rear. I shall be in front, with my back toward him."

"And he will be in front of me with his back toward me."

"Precisely. Afterward, when it is all over, we will pay a visit to the yacht, if I find, on my first visit, that it is worth while."

"There ought to be something interesting out there, Nick."

"Yes; and I think there will be."

CHAPTER XI.

ONE METHOD OF WORKING UP A CASE.

The arrangements which the detective had perfected for the capture of the Phantom Highwayman and the confederate were such that there seemed to be no possibility of failure, and when the detective thought over the matter, and realized how he had built up the case, almost from a mere nothing, he was himself amazed at the results.

In reality, as the reader will remember, the entire case had been built by him, from his mere comprehension of the method employed by the highwayman in appearing so suddenly before the selected victims—the elastic rope.

It was a slender clew indeed, but a perfect one nevertheless.

He had but to hark back in his own memory to that other case—which had been entered in his books under the title of "An East River Mystery" and to recall the rope found on the rail of Brooklyn Bridge, to connect the two affairs.

And from that point the argument had been an easy one.

There are many things possible to a determined criminal, which a man would find it impossible to accomplish.

Let the reader remember that the case in hand—the tracking down of the Phantom Highwayman—was built entirely upon circumstantial evidence.

Nick Carter did not possess, thus far, a single positive clew.

The only circumstances about which he was absolutely certain were that there were two persons concerned in performing the robberies, that one of them was a woman, that the other was a short, thickset, powerful man, that the hedge where Langham was robbed had been leaped by the woman and that the confederate had gone through the victim from behind without himself being seen.

There the positive details ended; and there began the circumstantial.

For the circumstantial, he had the evidence of his inspection of the rope which a woman criminal had once made use of in leaping—safely, as he believed—from the height of Brooklyn Bridge to the river; he had the single copper-colored hair which matched, in his recollection, quite perfectly with that woman's hair; he had discovered the dainty dimensions of the woman highwayman's foot, and he recalled the fact that he had particularly noticed that the Agnes Marlow of his memory possessed an extraordinarily small foot; he recalled the fact that her shoes were of unusual excellence and that they were trimmed with flat buttons—a thing quite unusual—and he had found such a button near the scene of the Tucker's Lane robbery; he was positive, that in order to appear so suddenly before her victims, as if she had dropped from the clouds, she must perforce leap the hedge, or the fence between them, and that this could not be accomplished without the aid of some lifting power such as an elastic rope might afford; and finally, a woman, in order to perform such a seeming miracle, must be daring, cool, strong, self-reliant, bold to fearlessness, and light of weight as well as slight of build. All these he remembered Agnes Marlow to be.

Turning then to another view of the case, it appeared that almost every victim of the highwayman, at least in that particular locality, was a member of the club to which Ralph Langham belonged—the Samovar; and in sequence with this information was the fact that each of the victims had met the robber at a time when that victim carried about his person an unusual sum of money.

It followed, therefore, that there must be a source of information by which the highwayman learned positively of these facts.

But there was a stronger point than this which connected the highwayman or a confederate directly with the Samovar Club.

The very methods employed by the robbers precluded the idea that they were not thoroughly well informed concerning the habits of the person robbed.

There was never any element of chance in the performance of the robberies.

Your ordinary highwayman, or footpad, takes his station along a road or a highway and awaits there the coming of a victim—any victim. He robs whoever is unfortunate enough to appear first upon the scene, taking his chances regarding what he may secure.

It was not so in the present cases.

Here the robbers entered into an elaborate preparation for their one victim, knowing that at about a certain

hour, he would pass that particular spot, and that he would have a certain sum of money in his possession.

Ergo, some one who was connected with the Samovar Club must be in league with the highwaymen.

Now again, from the evidences discovered by Nick Carter at the place where Langham was robbed, he had been able to determine quite satisfactorily, the height, build and general appearance of the man as well as the woman who performed the deed, and seated opposite him at the breakfast table in the clubhouse, he discovered such a man.

And now entered another, and even a stronger, reason for his suspicions concerning Richard Barlow. (There was, of course, the name; Barlow was much like Marlow; but still that fact carried very little weight with the detective, for while the names might be similar in effect, they were as remote in fact, as Jones and Brown.)

But Ralph Langham had told no living person other than the detective, that he had been robbed at all, and if Barlow were the man who was concerned in that affair, it was evident that he believed Langham's pride would not permit him to confess the fact, even to the detective; and so, Barlow—provided he was guilty—had arranged the little fiction of the adventure of Conners at that same spot, knowing full well that the detective would find some evidence that persons had been inside that hedge, but doubtless not realizing how much the sharp eyes of the detective would discover.

Then came the confession of Conners, and Nick had at once nailed to the mast, so to speak, his suspicions against Barlow.

Then the detective's shrewd questioning of Conners about the yacht; his belief that big Conners' good-natured stupidity had led Barlow to bring him in contact with the woman in the case. Then the very evident fact that if the yacht was the home of the woman highwayman Conners had been induced to become a guest there at just such times when his testimony, if it should ever become necessary, could materially assist them in proving an alibi.

It was a beautiful game all through; the prettiest collection of circumstantial evidence devoid of actual facts that the detective remembered to have had presented to him.

And then, most important of all, in the ultimate working out of the case—came Conners' statement that he had been requested to dine aboard the yacht on that particular Monday evening.

And here, reader, we once more come into contact with the shrewd reasoning powers of the detective—with his method of putting two and two together.

First: He was satisfied that the previous invitations to Conners had been extended at a time when they wished him aboard the yacht in order to establish an alibi for themselves should it ever become necessary to do so.

Second: If that were true, it followed that this particular invitation for Monday night had been given for the same reasons, and hence it followed that there was another robbery planned for that particular night.

Third: Every adventure of the highwaymen, thus far, had been the result of carefully matured plans.

Fourth: Monday evening and night would be the last of the month—the one immediately preceding the first day of the ensuing month. Now the first days of months are apt to be pay days, and a man who had men to pay off in a locality like that one would be likely to provide himself with the necessary cash, and to take it home with him the preceding day.

Fifth: Since the source of information upon which the highwaymen worked evidently proceeded from the club itself, and since their plans were carefully mapped out upon that information, it followed that there was likely to be some person connected with the club who paid off on the first days of the months, who provided himself with the cash on the preceding day, and whose habits were therefore already known to the highwaymen.

Sixth: The important count in this indictment of facts was here. If Nick Carter's surmises and theories were correct, such a person would be found among the membership of the club and the detective would therefore be enabled to anticipate the plans of the robbers. If his surmises and theories were not correct, his whole case fell flat, and he would be compelled to commence it over again at the beginning.

The reader will remember how he tested his own theory in this particular, by asking his friend Langham if he knew of such a man not among the membership of the club, and how the selection had finally fallen upon Mr. Graeme, who was a member.

The detective felt that his theory was almost positively established, then.

We, who have followed the case through from the beginning, have believed all along that the circumstantial evidence discovered by the detective was tending toward the guilt of the persons for whom he was now laying his traps; but if we take the trouble to go back

over the bare facts as they presented themselves, it will be seen that there was in reality very little to build upon for the apprehension of the actual thieves.

And even now, if an accident should interfere with the culmination of the plans of the robbers—if for any reason unforeseen they should be prevented from holding up the young architect, as Nick was confident they had planned to do—if a sudden storm should arise; if, in short, that particular hold up should not take place, there remained not a scintilla of evidence in the possession of the detective whereby he could arrest either of the parties whom he believed were contemplating it.

It was only in the commission of the actual robbery that he could hope to nail the absolute proof of their guilt to them.

It was only by catching them red-handed that he could hope to convict them.

He possessed no proof whatever that they were the robbers, for his proofs, such as they were, led him merely to the point where a robbery was to be committed, and not at all to the people who had committed those which had preceded it.

That was why he denominated it a slender clew; because it pointed at a circumstance and not at an individual.

That was why, as he expressed it to Chick, he put all his eggs in one basket, and depended solely upon his intuitive reasoning powers to lead him directly to the goal he desired; and when Chick remarked, *sotto voce:*

"Suppose, Nick, that you have misquilted, and that Graeme—or you—should not be held up, what then?"

"Why, then," replied Nick, "I am wrong, and we will have to begin over again on another tack, that's all."

And so now let us see how it all turned out.

CHAPTER XII.

A SUBSTITUTION OF IDENTITIES.

When Nick Carter, accompanied by Chick, arrived at the gate in front of Ralph Langham's residence, it was Chick who had assumed the disguise in which each of them had in turn been present at the Samovar Club; but Nick had been contented to remain without any at all; in other words, he appeared as he had done when Langham had first called upon him at his home in New York and engaged his services in the matter.

They had waited only a few moments when Langham and the architect appeared.

Langham stepped forward quickly, and perceiving Chick first, and believing him to be Nick, was about to introduce Graeme to him, when he discovered Nick, and of course recognized him.

"Hello!" he exclaimed. "How is this? Are there two Nick Carters?"

"Oh, Chick and I take turns," replied Nick, smiling. "Is this Mr. Graeme? How are you, sir? Gentlemen, this is my assistant, Chickering Carter. I adopted him some years ago, as a son, and now I call him a brother. If he keeps on, I will have to change that to father before long, I'm afraid. Shall we go inside, Mr. Langham?"

Once inside the house, the detective went directly to the point in hand.

"Mr. Graeme, has Mr. Langham told you anything about the reason for this interview?"

"No," replied Graeme. "He said, merely, that you wished to see me."

"I thought it best to leave all the revelations in this affair to you, Carter," interrupted Langham.

"Very good," replied the detective, with a smile. And then turning again toward the architect, he added:

"You have been selected, Mr. Graeme, as the next victim of the Phantom Highwayman."

"The devil I have!" exclaimed the architect. "I can hardly call that pleasant information."

"No? Well, perhaps what I have to say now will be better. I wish you to consent to the substitution of myself for that interesting adventure."

"With all my heart, Mr. Carter, if—er—the highwayman doesn't object," replied Graeme, laughing. "I suppose he naturally feels some interest in the matter, but I don't know as I need to consider him; eh?"

"Oh, he will object all right, when the matter is brought to his attention," said Nick.

"But it won't be, eh, until it is too late for his end of it?"

"Exactly."

"May I ask, Mr. Carter, if you are in the confidence of the Phantom?"

"Hardly that; and yet I happen to know about this particular arrangement."

"It is unnecessary to ask you how, I suppose?"

"I would find it difficult to tell you, I'm afraid."

"How do you propose to effect this substitution?"

"By making myself up to appear as exactly like you

that your closest friends would not perceive the difference."

"And can you do that?"

"Certainly, else I would not have proposed it."

"Very well, sir. I'm willing. I would much prefer that you should be stopped by the highwayman than I."

"I've no doubt of it."

"Now, Mr. Carter, to be serious, what do you wish me to do?"

"First, tell me exactly what your plans are, from the moment when you propose to start for the city after the money which you intend to use in paying off your men on Tuesday, until the moment when you would ordinarily find yourself safely at home and in bed to-morrow night."

"I can do that, for my characteristics are rather methodical."

"I had supposed that to be the case."

"You wish me to detail to you my program for to-morrow, as I have already arranged it?"

"Yes; and tell it exactly as you would if you expected still to carry it out."

"Very good. I shall start, then, for the city about noon. I will arrive at the bank and draw the money about two. I shall then go to luncheon at my club, on Fifth Avenue. At five, I leave the club and start, in a cab, for my mother's house in Seventy-second street. I remain there to dinner, which she expects me to do. She also expects me to spend the evening with her, and has asked in a number of friends to meet me. This, Mr. Carter, is the invariable rule with her and with me for the last day of every month."

"I see. I understand. Go on."

"I leave home, as I call my mother's house, at a quarter before eleven in order to catch a car which passes the corner at eleven. I invariably take that car."

"And you leave it—where?"

"At the corner of Langham Place and the avenue out here—one street further up; you know; eh?"

"Yes. Now what time does that car arrive at that particular corner?"

"At twelve-forty."

"Good. What route do you take then?"

"I walk through Langham Place on the east side of the street, I turn the next corner without crossing, and walk eastward to the house where I am living, a matter of thirty or forty rods. That is all. I am usually in bed by one o'clock."

"That is excellent, Mr. Graeme. Now, I wish you to carry out that program to the letter to-morrow with the one difference in it, that you remain overnight at your mother's house, and make your journey out here as early or as late as you please the following morning."

"I understand."

"I wish you and your money to remain safely in the house of your mother until after daylight to-morrow. I will, myself, catch the car you would have taken, and I will board it a mile or two below here. I will leave it at the corner of Langham Place and walk toward your own place of residence as you would have done."

"So if there is any holding up to be done, you will be the victim instead of ——"

"I will be your substitute, that is all."

"I am quite contented with that arrangement, and I want to thank you ——"

"The thanks are due from me, not to me," said Nick. "If it were not for your methodical habits, I might have found it impossible to catch this highwayman so easily."

"You have no doubt, then, that you will succeed?"

"Not one in the world. And now, sir, if you will permit me to make a copy of your appearance, your part of the work will be done, save that I wish you to return to the club again to-night, with Mr. Langham, so that you can leave there and go to your home at about your habitual time—eleven o'clock. I do not wish any change in your habits to appear at this moment."

"All right."

"Now, Mr. Graeme, if you will sit here, under this light, and with your back to the mirror, I will get to work. Chick, have you the satchel there?"

"All ready."

"Good!"

Nick divested himself of his coat, waistcoat, collar, etc., drew a small table near to Mr. Graeme, upon which he placed his paraphernalia and began the transformation while Langham and Graeme watched him with absorbed interest.

First, he selected a wig of the desired hue, and this he spent some time in trimming to his satisfaction. After he had fixed it upon his head he spent some time in arranging it with comb and brush until it exactly resembled Graeme's hair.

"Our complexions are almost the same," he said, "and I will have to do very little to mine, therefore. What there is to do, I can do to-morrow just as well as now. But in the half light there will be very little need of

much change in that. It is only the chance that I may be closely observed when I leave the car at the corner."

Next he selected a small mustache and trimmed it to the exact shape of the one worn by Graeme, and then a closely cropped beard of the Vandyke shape followed suit.

When these were adjusted, he made some slight alteration in the shape of his brows, with a pencil made for that purpose, and then stepping closer to the mirror, he busied himself there for a considerable time, putting touches here and there upon his face, forehead, neck, etc., until he was thoroughly satisfied with his appearance.

Then he turned and faced the architect and Langham.

"Well, what do you think of it?" he asked.

"Wonderful!" exclaimed Langham.

"Remarkable!" said Graeme.

"Yes; I think it is good myself."

"Good! You would deceive my own mother for a few moments."

"I've no doubt of it. Now, Mr. Graeme, what sort of a hat do you wear when you go to the city on these trips?"

"One like that one you wore when we met you at the gate just now—a fedora."

"Good. And your other clothing?"

"I should have worn the suit of clothes I have on me now."

"Better. We are about the same size and build. I will ask you to carry with you to-morrow when you start, a satchel containing another suit. You are to wear this one when you go away, but you will change into the other one as soon as you arrive in the city, and you will send this one back here, to Mr. Langham's house for me, by a special messenger. You will arrive in the city shortly after one and the messenger should be back here with the satchel containing the clothes by three or four o'clock at the latest."

"I will do that."

"Then, in that case, I think our arrangements are complete."

"It would seem so."

"We will catch the highwayman, Mr. Graeme."

"Yes; and you will have saved me the loss of a considerable sum, for I should have fallen into the trap that have laid for me with both feet. I want you to understand that I appreciate it."

"I see."

"My only regret is that I am obliged under the arrangement to remain in New York. I should have enjoyed being present to see the fun, for I am sure there will be some fun."

"Fun? Yes. But it may not be all fun, Mr. Graeme, don't forget that. There may be, also, a little scrap."

CHAPTER XIII.

BAITING AND SETTING THE TRAP.

The greater part of Monday passed without incident.

Chick remained at the clubhouse in the character which was recognized there as Nick Carter, during the forenoon, and in pursuance of the detective's instructions, had some conversation with Conners relative to his dinner engagement for that evening, when that gentleman appeared at the Samovar for his customary highballs.

Ralph Langham remained home from business that day, too. The air was too full of expectancy for him to have been content to have absented himself from the scene, even for an hour, and so he was also at the club.

Nick Carter himself remained under cover at the old mansion where he had established his headquarters, and from the window of the room saw the yacht arrive in the cove early in the day.

At the club, during the course of the afternoon, Barlow appeared, and a few moments later Conners came around for the second time that day.

Believing that Chick was really Nick Carter, the two men chaffed him somewhat about the highwayman and the fact that that interesting individual was not yet apprehended.

At the hour agreed upon between them, Barlow and Conners left the club together, and took their leisurely way along one of the avenues, ultimately turning so that their course led them to the cove near the house where Nick was concealed.

He saw them pass, for it was not yet quite dark.

He saw Barlow wave his hat toward the trim craft at anchor, and presently a boat put off from her, and they were taken on board.

"It is working splendidly, lad," said the detective to Chick, when the latter appeared at the old mansion half an hour later. "It couldn't be better. And now tell me—did you discover the most likely place for Barlow to make use of in arranging the elastic rope?"

"Just the very spot. In fact, along the whole route which you will walk from the car to the house where Graeme lives, there is only one place which he would be likely to select."

"And you have spotted it, eh?"

"You bet!"

"Is there a place near there where you can hide to be near Barlow when the attack is made?"

"A dandy place. I can lie right under the hedge, at almost the precise spot. He will never discover me in the world, and I will be right on hand when the woman lights on the walk in front of you from over the hedge."

"That is good. I suppose that satchel you brought with you contains Graeme's suit of clothes, eh?"

"Yes. It came by messenger, about three-thirty."

"Then everything is ready."

"Except the highwaymen."

"Yes. And that reminds me. I think instead of going aboard that yacht as I had thought to do, I will send you."

"All right."

"I don't care to take any chances of spoiling things by monkeying with this disguise. It is so good now that—well, you won't need the one you have on any more, so you may as well slip out of it and make for the yacht."

"How shall I get out to her?" asked Chick.

"Oh, the water is warm."

"Swim, eh?"

"It's as good a way as any. It really is not important that you should go at all, only I would like to know something about the personnel aboard the yacht, before we descend upon it after we have made the captures ashore."

"I'll go. I won't be long."

"All right, lad."

It took Chick only a short time to make himself ready for the swim to the yacht, and the detective went down to the beach with him when he started, and waited there until he returned.

The assistant was gone nearly two hours altogether, and Nick had begun to feel some anxiety concerning him, when he appeared, almost at the shore.

Towels and clothing were ready there for him, and it was not long before he was rehabilitated as he should be, and then the two withdrew up the shore until they were screened by the foliage, and seated themselves to smoke and talk over what had happened to Chick, while they watched the yacht for the coming of the Phantom Highwayman and the man Barlow.

"By Jove! Nick, but she's a beauty!" was Chick's first exclamation.

"Yes, and fast, too, I suppose," replied Nick.

Chick laughed.

"I was referring to the woman," he said.

"Oh! well," murmured Nick, "my adjective might apply to her as well as to the yacht, for all I know. So you saw her, did you?"

"Indeed I did. And heard her, too."

"Well, tell me about it."

"I had no difficulty in climbing aboard without being discovered. I don't think it occurs to them to set a watch."

"Probably not."

"And there are only five in the crew, all told; a captain, two men, a fireman and an engineer. They were all down in the forepeak playing cards."

"There must be a cook and a steward."

"Both Chinamen. They don't count."

"Oh! all right. Go on."

"They were both as busy as bees, too, in the galley. Conners was with Barlow and the woman in the cabin."

"Drinking highballs, I suppose."

"Conners was. He was getting mellow, too, or appeared to be; but I think he is rather on the alert tonight. He has evidently taken it to heart that he has been fooled as he has, and is resolved to see this thing out to the end."

"I only hope that his eagerness will not spoil any part of our plans."

"Oh! I don't think so."

"Well?"

"Their conversation in the cabin was not interesting; but, after a while, the woman left the table and strolled out on the deck. I got out of her sight, but that was not difficult. She went aft to the rail and stood there waiting, and, after a moment, Barlow followed her.

"I was on the point of creeping nearer to hear what they had to talk about, when I saw Conners leave the table to follow them, so I waited at the companion-way door for him. As soon as he came near enough I stopped him.

"'Go back, Conners. Wait in the cabin,' I said to him. 'I want to hear what they have to say.'

"'Carter, you're a devil,' he replied; but he went back to the table.

"Well, I got near enough to hear them, and everything they said."

"What was it?"

"Oh! just maturing their plans.

"'Conners will be drunk before eleven, at this rate,'

said the woman. 'We ought to be able to leave the yacht by eleven-thirty.'

"'Sure,' replied Barlow.

"'Did Graeme go after the money?' she asked, then.

"'Yes; just the same as usual.'

"'And what about the tree you selected for the jump?'

"'I took the one you suggested,' he said. 'I can fix the whole thing in ten minutes after we get there. All you have to do, Agnes, is to hurry up and fill Conners to the brim so that we can get away from here as soon as possible.'

"They returned to the cabin after that."

"All right, Chick. There is no use in our waiting here. I'll get into Graeme's clothes, and go down to catch the car, and you had better get along to the scene of the hold up. When the woman lights in front of me, and Barlow starts in to do his act, you grab onto him from behind. I'll take care of the woman: and she is the more dangerous of the two, at that."

CHAPTER XIV.

"HANDS UP, OR YOU ARE A DEAD MAN!"

It was by no means a dark night, this one selected for the hold up.

Both moon and stars were shining brightly, and as if to add to the illumination of the scene, the tree selected for the point where the hedge was to be leaped by the woman highwayman, was not far removed from an arc light.

And yet, under ordinary circumstances there was very little chance that the robbers would have been interrupted in their operations, for the streets in that neighborhood were, as a rule, utterly deserted at that hour of the night.

The residents, almost *in toto*, had retired; windows were darkened, and it is doubtful even if a cry for assistance would have brought a response.

When Nick Carter, in appearance the exact image of the architect, Graeme, stepped from the car at the corner and started through Langham Place, he remarked upon these details.

The way in front of him was remarkably clear, he thought.

Large, old-growth trees lined the border of the walk, and the street itself was wide and open.

The detective could see ahead of him, without difficulty, as far as the next street, where he was supposed to turn, if he was permitted to go that far.

But he knew that he would not be left unmolested that long.

The tree, as described to him by Chick, was halfway between where he paused on the corner for a moment, and the house wherein lived the brother of Ralph Langham, and it was there at that tree where he expected to see the apparition of the black specter—the Phantom Highwayman—the woman who dared to rob men in the open streets at night.

He halted on the corner for a moment, for two reasons; one was to permit the car to get out of the way, for he wished no sound of what might happen to reach its passengers, and the other was to look carefully, but stealthily, about him for some sign of the presence of Barlow, the assistant highwayman.

He saw no sign of him, however, and it occurred to the detective then that Barlow might have chosen to conceal himself under the hedge, as well as Chick; and he shrugged his shoulders as he thought:

"I only hope they did not happen to select the same spot, and that it is all over before my arrival."

Then he continued on his way, walking slowly, in order to give the interruptors sufficient time to act.

As he drew nearer to the tree he became especially alert.

He believed that he could figure almost to the fraction of an instant the very second when the Phantom Highwayman would appear, as if dropping from the clouds, and he was curious to witness as much of the performance as possible.

He could even see the limb from which the rope was doubtless hanging at that moment; but although he looked for the rope itself, he could not see that.

And then he arrived at the spot. The chosen spot.

The moon was upon his left, as was also the hedge which the woman had to leap, and as he came directly under the limb, he saw a shadow rise suddenly into the air.

And the rest of it was all done so quickly that that was all he did see until the Phantom Highwayman stood before him.

The program was carried out exactly as it had been described to him.

There was not the slightest noise; not the suggestion of the approach of anybody, and he could well understand how the victims of these robberies had been entirely taken

off their guard each time, so that there was no recourse for them but to submit.

There was the shadow ascending on the detective's left, and then the sharp pat of her feet as they struck the pavement in front of him.

At the same instant he found himself looking upon a slight and graceful figure, clad in knickerbockers and jersey, with a slouch hat pulled well down in front, and the face concealed behind a draped half mask, which effectually concealed the features from view.

The woman's right arm was extended and the hand held a dangerous-looking pistol, pointed at Nick Carter's head.

At precisely the same moment a man's voice from behind where he stood exclaimed:

"Hands up, or you are a dead man! Hands up!"

Nick Carter raised his hands slowly, for he wished to give Chick plenty of time.

Then, just as he got them into the air over his head, and just at the instant when, if the program had been carried out as the robbers had figured it, the man behind would have begun the operation of going through his pockets, he dropped them suddenly, and, in doing so, also leaped to one side and forward with the same motion.

Neither of the robbers expected this move.

Their exploits had been conducted with such unvarying success hitherto that it evidently did not occur to either of them that this one could fail.

It is true that as Nick leaped forward the woman in front of him uttered a sharp exclamation, started back a little and at the same instant pulled the trigger of her weapon.

It was discharged, too.

The muzzle of it had been lowered as she started back upon Nick's action, and the detective felt the sting of the ball as it grazed his left side, tearing through his clothing and speeding on its way to another mark than his body.

He was conscious, also, as he made the spring, that Chick had arrived on the scene and was carrying out his part of the program.

He heard a grunt behind him at the same instant he seized upon the woman, who, with the discharge of her weapon, had turned to dart away—to escape—for, even in that instant, she could see that she had missed her aim.

But she was not quick enough.

The detective seized her and brought her up with a sharp turn, which wheeled her around so that she stood facing him, and, at the same time, he wrenched the pistol from her grasp and let it fall to the ground.

Then, holding her easily with one hand, he tore the mask from her face and the hat from her head, and she stood revealed, as he had supposed she would, no other than the Agnes Marlow he remembered so well, who had once dared to make the daring leap from Brooklyn Bridge.

But she faced him dauntlessly and with flashing eyes, outwardly not a whit frightened or cast down by her capture.

"I think we have met before, Agnes," said the detective, calmly.

"Yes," she replied, coolly. "You have fooled me, haven't you? I might have known that you would accomplish it somehow. You are not the architect, Graeme, but Nick Carter."

"You are right," he said.

"Why don't you look behind you?" she asked. "Your assistant is standing there waiting. He does not seem to know what to do."

Nick, without releasing his hold upon Agnes, turned, and he saw that Chick was standing over the prostrate and silent form of Richard Barlow.

"Eh, Chick," he asked, "what has happened? Did you have to hurt him?"

"He is dead," replied Chick. "Stone dead. The woman's bullet killed him."

The detective turned his head again and faced the woman, but only to find that she was quietly laughing.

"You see," she said, "there will now be only one of us to answer to your charge."

And at that moment the front door of Robert Langham's house opened, and the two Langhams, followed by several members of the club, came out upon the scene.

"It was too good to keep, Carter," said Ralph Langham. "We had to be in at the death, you know. Hello! It is a death, isn't it?" as he caught sight of Barlow's body.

Then he turned toward Agnes Marlow.

"And so," he said, "you are the Phantom Highwayman, eh?"

"Yes," she replied, coolly, "and I warn you now that I will live to hold you up again, but next time, Ralph Langham, it will be for a million."

THE END.

Next week's issue, No. 430, will contain "A Million-Dollar Hold Up; or, Nick Carter's Richest Client."

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